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# BEHIND THE CAMERA









DAWIYA SEES HIMSELF

*Frontispiece*

# BEHIND THE CAMERA

By  
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GEOFFREY BLES  
TWO MANCHESTER SQUARE  
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J. AND J. GRAY  
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To  
BARKIE AND RODDIE



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## Chapter One

IT has always been one of my pet notions that if you want a thing badly enough and are prepared to wait long enough without taking any violent action in the matter, you will get it. It may come in the form in which you least expect it. Often, alas, you will find you have paid pretty heavily for it, but in the end, if you have gone on steadily wanting, you will get it.

Most of us cast about wildly in our adolescent years trying to find out what it is that we really want to do. A small talent for drawing may convince us for a while that the summit of our ambitions is to become a successful fashion artist. We spend long hours copying designs and producing out of our own heads monstrous caricatures of the human frame draped in what we conceive to be original variations of the current mode.

We begin to go to theatres and movies. "If I could be dressed and groomed like that, *I* could act," we tell ourselves. Or perhaps, after a long course of miscellaneous reading ranging from the *Magnet* and the *Gem* to Sir Walter Scott, we buy a twopenny exercise-book and set to work on a novel.

None of these phases passed me by, but when I was fifteen and still at school, the War broke out, and life in general assumed a very different aspect. At sixteen, filled with patriotic fervour, I was busily thumping a

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typewriter in a Government office. The independence conferred by my weekly salary produced a temporary state of contentment. But it was not long before, cooped up as I was in the basement of a Northumberland Avenue hotel, I began to be assailed by a feeling of violent restlessness. I must get away—do something in the open air. My thoughts turned to ambulance driving.

"Let me learn to drive?" I implored my father.

"No. You're too young."

"Well then, let me join the W.A.A.C.s?"

"No!" said my father, still more firmly, and without giving any reason.

So I plodded on and had a good time with friends on leave, but all the time at the back of my mind there was crystallizing an overpowering desire to travel.

"Just think of it!" I would explode to my long-suffering mother. "There's all this wonderful world full of the most marvellous things and people and places, and I can't get at it!"

At last the barriers of war were down. The world was open once more. My restless feeling persisted, but it was not until 1923 that I first set foot out of England. With a party of friends I spent a holiday in Brittany. Far from slaking my desire, this brief excursion acted as a spur which drove me, shortly afterwards, to become engaged to be married to an American. I did not love him. I liked him enormously—and I thought I saw New York on the horizon.

Here Fate stepped in.

"This young woman," she said, "is getting a bit

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beyond herself," and she set in my way a minute but powerful germ—the germ of infantile paralysis.

For six weeks I lay at home, completely helpless from the waist downwards, under the impression that I was suffering from rheumatic fever. Then I was removed to a London hospital for electrical treatment and massage.

It was not until I had been in the hospital for a couple of months that I found out what was really the matter with me. One morning the staff nurse, a grim, efficient person with far too much to do, was giving me my treatment. I had been making enquiries about another patient, when something in the nature of the replies I received raised a doubt in my mind.

"But *I'm* not paralysed, Nurse, am I?" I enquired.

"Of course you are," she replied, and I felt that for two pins she would have added, "Don't be so silly!"

I thought this over for some minutes while she continued to stroke my leg with the damp pad which felt like thousands of red-hot needles running up and down. Somehow paralysis had never occurred to me. I had always thought that when people were paralysed they went all stiff—and I was all limp.

Presently I said, "I shall get better, shan't I, Nurse?"

"Of course you will," she replied absently, her thoughts elsewhere.

And with that, strangely enough, I was satisfied.

For two more months I lay there. My right leg gradually became strong and shapely, but the left was obstinate. Then a much-loved doctor uncle wrote to

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my specialist: "If I can continue the treatment in my home, can she be moved?"

Permission was granted, and a day came when I dressed myself and waited, like a prisoner reprieved, for my mother to fetch me. For four months I had been shut up in a small green-walled room with a screen across the open door, and a window so placed that I had only recently been able to lift myself up and peer down at the hurrying people in Maida Vale, envying the meanest and shabbiest individual with two strong legs to walk upon.

In a country village in Cheshire the world gradually began to expand. What an adventure it was, coming downstairs for luncheon—even though it meant sitting down on the top stair and lowering myself step by step on my hands. How wonderful it was to lie in the sunny garden, where the cows in the surrounding fields came browsing up to the hedge, and the bees buzzed among the banks of flowers. After a while, with two stout sticks, I began to walk a few steps each day. To be sure, I had some nasty tumbles, and my left foot dragged a bit, but I put this down to weakness. It is extraordinary how one can deceive oneself.

Then there came a day when my uncle said I might take a walk along the lane through the woods. With my mother in attendance and two Irish setters bounding and barking alongside, I set out. A hundred yards was enough. I had to be wheeled back. But I had made a start, and before very long I was taking quite long walks with only the dogs and one stick for company. But I still tumbled down quite a lot, and pre-

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sently it began to dawn on me that my left leg wasn't getting any better, in spite of the continued treatment.

At last, one evening, I determined to find out the truth.

"Shall I ever get quite better again, Uncle?" I asked. "I really want to know."

My uncle looked at me gravely for a moment or two. Then he said, "No, my dear. I'm afraid you won't. You will become a good deal stronger and more active than you are now, but you will never recover the full use of that leg."

Mercifully, I was standing by the door. I stumbled out, and up the stairs, praying that nobody would follow me. I flung myself on my bed and there in the darkness, for the first time in all those long months, howled my eyes out.

But youth has a resilience all its own. The next day was telling myself, "They have got to do something worse than this to get me down."

I continued my walks, going farther and farther afield. By December, the wholesome country air, my uncle's charm and my aunt's unceasing care and good fare, all working together on a naturally strong constitution, had made me well enough to give up the treatment and go home for Christmas.

The ensuing six months were perhaps the hardest of all to bear. I was not yet considered strong enough to work, and back in my own circle I realized to the full the limitations that had been placed upon me. I could not dance or play any games. Kind friends, meeting me, said, "What a pity!" as though I had

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broken a saucer or missed a bus. Trams and buses did indeed elude me because I could not put on that little extra spurt of speed, but that was only a minor annoyance.

In June, however, I was pronounced well enough to undertake a local job. I scoured the papers, answered advertisements by the dozen, but somehow a suitable job would not turn up. By the kindness of a friend of my father, the editor of the local paper, an advertisement had been appearing on my behalf regularly each week. It was not until October that I received the only reply it ever evoked. This was a letter asking me to call at the studios of British Instructional Films, Ltd., which were then located a mile and a half from my home.

It was a golden autumn morning when I walked up the gravel drive to the door of the large mansion standing in its own grounds, which was the headquarters of the company. Lying across the top of the steps, which were flanked by a couple of pugnacious-looking stone lions, was a large mound of grey fluff. It rose to its feet and revealed itself as a young sheep-dog. Bonzo had no tail, but he managed very well without. He wagged and wriggled his entire body in welcome. I rang the bell, feeling this canine friendliness to be a good omen.

In a few moments I was shown into a large, sun-flooded room with long french windows. Seated behind a desk at the far end was the managing director, Mr. H. Bruce Woolfe.

I sat down in the chair indicated. He asked me all the usual questions and seemed satisfied with my

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replies. Could I start on Monday? I said that I could, but added, "There is something I think you ought to know before you engage me."

"What is it?" he asked, in his somewhat forbidding manner.

"Well——" I hesitated, "I'm a little bit lame. I can't run up and down stairs quickly, or anything like that."

"You won't have to," he replied briefly, and showed me courteously to the door.

I settled down very quickly in my new job. The journey was no more than I could manage comfortably, and the work became increasingly interesting as the months flew by. I began to learn how to cut and edit films and write titles. And then once more the call of far places got to work upon me.

At that time the company was making a series of short films of the British Empire. Australia, New Zealand, the West Indies, Nigeria, Canada, Palestine, flickered before my eyes on the little screen in the dark projection room.

Later there began to arrive each week a batch of film from Geoffrey Barkas and Stanley Rodwell, who were travelling as official cinematographers to H.R.H. the Prince of Wales on his 1925 tour of West and South Africa and South America. One day I took down a letter to Geoffrey Barkas asking him if he would care to undertake to organize and direct a full-length feature film in Nigeria. I little thought, when I filed his cabled acceptance, that this was the start of my dream coming true.



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All the same, I was interested in these two young men. They were sending back some excellent material.

"What are they like? How old are they?" I asked some of the cutting-room girls.

"Roddie is twenty-three," they informed me. "He's a dear, but he's married."

"And Barkas?"

They smiled reminiscently. "Oh, you're sure to like Mr. Barkas. He's got such lovely blue eyes!"

I found it hard to accept blue eyes alone as a certain indication of an attractive personality, but it was clear that he was very popular.

When eventually they both turned up at the studio, it was to Rodwell's soft voice and brown eyes that I took most kindly. Barkas, though his eyes were undoubtedly of the bluest, had a confident, carefree air and a teasing wit which somehow intimidated me.

For some weeks they were busy clearing up odds and ends connected with the tour, but at length they got busy on preparations for the Nigerian trip, and it soon became evident that some sort of assistant and secretary would be required to accompany them.

One morning, as I was rising from his desk with a note-book full of letters, Mr. Woolfe said:

"How would you like to go out to Nigeria, Miss Webb, and help Barkas make this film?"

For a moment I was too astonished to speak. I just sat down again and stared at him.

"Do you mean it, Mr. Woolfe?" I said at last.

"Certainly I do," he replied, with one of his rare smiles.

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"But have you put it to Barkas? I mean, does he know about me?"

"I told him I was going to suggest it to you, and he seemed quite agreeable. Would you like to go?"

"I should just think I would!" I said, in a passion of gratitude, my head already whirling with plans.

"Well, you'd better go and see him," said Mr. Woolfe, on a note of dismissal.

I found Barkas in one of the cutting-rooms.

"May I speak to you for a moment?" I asked.

"Yes, of course. Come up to my office."

I followed him, one step at a time, in my usual fashion, to his office in an attic at the top of the house.

"Take a seat," he said.

I perched myself on the edge of the table. He stood by the window.

"Mr. Woolfe has just asked me if I would like to come to Nigeria with you," I began at once, trying hard to control my excitement.

"He told me he was going to," said Barkas calmly. "Are you coming?"

"Well, what do *you* think about it? You hardly know me!"

"Well, if it comes to that, you don't know me either!" he laughed.

Then, gazing out across the tree-tops, I said my piece once again.

"I suppose you know I'm a bit lame? I may fall down at any moment and become a frightful liability."

"I shouldn't worry about that," replied this light-hearted person. "I'll take a chance if you will."

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And so it came about that on the 23rd December 1925 I stood on the same platform at Euston as that to which, just over two years before, I had been brought in an ambulance, scarcely able to stand. I had waited a long time. I had suffered quite a bit. I had got what I wanted in a most unexpected fashion. I was going to travel.

## *Chapter Two*

**W**HEN our last good-byes had been waved from the train, as it curved out of the station, Barkie and I, after having arranged to lunch together, found our respective seats, which were in different compartments, and settled down to sort out our ideas. Roddie had gone on to Liverpool a day ahead to see on board the mountain of luggage, stores, and camera equipment which was to go with us.

The train carried its accustomed load of returning "Coasters"—Government officials, political officers, mining engineers, officers of the West African Frontier Force. Some had their wives with them—the majority were alone. There were also nursing sisters returning from leave, and wives travelling out to join their husbands.

In my compartment there were four women. From their conversation I gathered that one was a nursing sister going back to Accra, on the Gold Coast, while another was the wife of a political officer.

After they had talked among themselves for a while, they turned their attention to me. Somehow or other it had become known that there was to be a film party on board, and they were anxious to know all about it.

I am not a very quick-thinking person. My wittiest remarks and most biting rejoinders are usually composed on the way home or in the bath next morning.

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With certain types of my own sex I feel myself particularly at a disadvantage. These four women were all considerably older than I—all experienced. For the first time I realized that it might be thought a little odd for me to be travelling alone with two young men. I dealt with their questions as best I could. As yet we scarcely knew our own plans. I did not wish to say too much, but I did not know whom I might be offending by becoming too evasive. It was unfortunate, too, that the play *White Cargo* was then running in London.

"Oh, I *hope* you're not going to do anything like that," they wailed. "It gives such a *wrong* impression of the country."

Altogether, I was extremely relieved when Barkie came to take me along to the dining-car. Seated opposite each other at a small table, while the train swayed through the Midlands, Barkie and I began to get acquainted with each other.

There are very few people who are really averse to talking about their travels to a sympathetic listener. Barkie was no exception. It was not long before I had discovered that of all the countries he had visited, Canada lay nearest to his heart. After the War, during which he had served in Egypt, Gallipoli and France, he had spent six months on a Canadian farm as a farmer's boy, with the idea of setting himself up in health. At the end of this time he sidled over the border into California on a twelve-hour shopping permit and joined up with an English film-producing company as camera assistant. With this company he returned to England some months later and remained

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with them for several years until he became a full-fledged cameraman with a number of successful productions to his name. All this time at the back of his mind had been the thought of returning some day to Canada. Now, with a reputation to back him up, he obtained a sum of money through an advertisement in *The Times*, hired a camera, and set off for Ontario. After a year spent wandering in the woods, living the life of the trapper and the lumberman, travelling hundreds of miles by canoe on the lakes, with dogs over the ice and snow in winter, he came back with a wonderful series of pictures which he called "Tall Timber Tales."

Then came the Prince's tour, from which he had just returned, and now he was setting off for West Africa with a cameraman and an assistant to see what he could do as a director of films.

We became so enthralled in our conversation that before we knew where we were we had arrived at Liverpool. Barkie took me straight to the ship—the *Appam* of the Elder-Dempster Line. He then went ashore again to see if he could help Roddie.

The lounge of the *Appam* was overflowing with excited people tearing open telegrams, sitting at writing-desks scribbling replies and last-minute letters, talking all the while to their friends and greeting new arrivals, while stewards threaded their way deftly with trays of drinks.

There was a telegram for me from my sister. Suddenly conscience-stricken, I sent one to my mother. In the confusion of departure she had stood quietly

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on one side while I chattered to my friends, but for weeks past she had rushed round shopping with and for me. All my packing had been done by her. Above everything, though she must have been filled with anxiety at the thought of my going so far away, she had said no single word to try to dissuade me. I sent off my belated appreciation of all this.

Then, feeling a trifle forlorn among all these gay strangers, I made my way down to my cabin, B.21, which I found I was to share with the nursing sister of the railway compartment. Having placed my name and hers on the morning bath list—a simple action which, I felt, definitely established me as a traveller—I went on deck again to see if my companions had returned.

Standing by the gangway were too tall figures—Roddie slightly stooping, Barkie unusually erect. Their overcoat collars were turned up, their felt hats, battered affairs with the names of far countries stamped on the linings, were worn with just the right tilt of careless assurance. I was delighted with them.

It was bitterly cold, and the grey, snow-laden sky was streaked with crimson from the setting sun. Bells were ringing and passengers' friends reluctantly retiring.

At last the gangways were withdrawn.

As we swung slowly out into the Mersey, I detached a couple of sprays of white heather from the large bunch pinned to my coat and gave one each to Barkie and Roddie. Roddie put his piece in his button-hole. Barkie's went into his pocket-book. The river widened—we began to slip out to sea—arms linked,

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we walked up and down the deck, and I smothered an idiotic impulse to mention the Three Musketeers. I felt gloriously young and adventurous. I knew that we had a big and responsible job before us. There would be lots of hard work in a climate with an evil reputation. But even at this early stage I felt that we should make a good team.

Next morning, Barkie called a committee meeting at an empty table in the dining-saloon, where we were allowed to work throughout the voyage.

We had no scenario. We had not even a definite story. The general idea was to show the life of a British district officer in a remote part of the Empire, administering justice, building roads and bridges, teaching the natives to develop their country and live peaceably together.

The love interest was to be supplied by a nursing sister, and the inevitable third side of the triangle was to be left to the director's discretion.

Two male artistes had been selected, and it had been arranged that Haddon Mason, playing the district officer, was to follow us in a month's time. A girl had also been engaged to play the nursing sister, but on being refused permission to bring her mother, had thrown up the part at the last minute. The final selection of her successor had therefore been left to Mr. Woolfe. She and Mr. Reginald Fox, the "heavy," were to await a cable from us.

These three roughly sketched characters, then, were to be the framework of the story. But before their fortunes could be decided there were many things to



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consider—questions of health, scenery, climate and transport.

In a country where malaria, blackwater fever, sleeping sickness and countless other malevolent bugs and beasts conspire to demolish the white man, health was the most important factor. Once we had started on the film, the loss of one of the artistes or a member of the production staff would have been disastrous.

Time was almost equally important.

Between the hazes of the harmattan season and the rains which commence in May, there is a brief period of clear, fine weather. This must be seized at all costs.

A contour map of Nigeria showed a promising area among the high lands of the Bauchi Plateau in the Northern Provinces. The presence of tin mines argued means of communication and a fair degree of transport organization. Pictures of the plateau scenery revealed a country far more vast and inspiring than the bush and jungle of the south, which appears monotonous and confused as a screen background.

Provided a certain amount of propaganda was introduced into the film, the Nigerian Government had promised to assist us, but to what extent we had no idea until we arrived in Lagos.

In the face of all these uncertainties it seemed probable that any story that might be written on the voyage would prove to be quite impracticable when we got down to realities. All the same, Barkie, who is always overflowing with energy, decided to get to work on a plot at once.

The first step was to find out from our fellow-

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passengers as much as possible about the country, its possibilities, and their own daily lives. When the little meeting was broken up by the luncheon gong, we were all resolved on the utmost sociability.

But seated opposite to me at one end of our table, which was right underneath a porthole, was a large, solid Dutch trader. To the right of him was a plump, pale, and extremely elegant Swiss gentleman who was neighboured by Barkie, sitting on my right. On my left was Roddie, and between him and the Dutchman sat a silent but observant individual named Vitoria, a tin miner returning to the Bauchi Plateau, who seemed to derive a good deal of quiet amusement from our end of the table. From him we learnt quite a lot, and incidentally struck up a friendship which flourishes to this day.

Very early on Christmas morning we entered the Bay of Biscay and our sociable intentions received a further setback. I drank my early tea thoughtfully and lay back again with a curious sensation of leaving my tummy in mid-air, first on one side, then on the other, varied by a kind of circular movement.

At 7.30 a.m. I rose with the intention of having a bath. But after a hasty glass of Eno, I found myself flat on my bunk again, swallowing hard. I won. But I remained where I was for the rest of the day, feeling extremely grateful to my late cabin mate for having removed herself bag and baggage to join another nurse in a cabin across the way, whence came sounds of severe distress.

After tea, my little stewardess, who had been pop-

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ping in and out all day to see if I was "all right," entered with a message.

"Your gentleman friend sends his compliments, and are you all right, Madam," she said.

"My compliments to Mr. Barkas. Tell him I'm bearing up, and ask him if he's going down to dinner."

An interval.

Then—"Mr. Barkas will if you will, Miss. I should," she urged. "The saloon looks lovely—all decorated. You may never be in a ship on Christmas Day again. *Do* now, Madam," she added persuasively.

Mentally I ran over the possibilities. If I *did* feel sick, no power on earth could enable me to run for it. Still, Angelina was right. I might never have the opportunity again. I decided to take a chance.

An hour later Barkie, pale but resolute, gave me his arm at the top of the stairs leading down into the saloon. Roddie, he said, had frankly gone under.

Dinner was a solemn and sparsely attended function. We toyed with several courses. I cannot remember being particularly impressed with the decorations. I had other things to think about. At one period Barkie retired hurriedly, while I remained at table swallowing hard, and wearing a fixed and glassy smile. Somehow I got through the meal without disaster, and then, having made our "gesture," we retired, as did the majority of the passengers.

Angelina, who never did make up her mind whether to address me as "Miss" or "Madam," said consolingly: "Never mind, Madam. The Captain says this is the worst storm he's known in the Bay for

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thirty years," which impressed me a good deal at the time, though I now suspect this kind of statement on the part of captains of being a polite fiction intended to boost up the self-respect of suffering passengers.

With the Bay behind us, the days passed quickly and agreeably. Barkie and I spent our mornings in the saloon with the typewriter, making plans and drafting stories. Roddie drifted in and out with suggestions, and passed a good deal of time very mysteriously in his cabin.

He was the owner, though not yet the master, of a ukulele banjo. For hours he pored over a complicated manual, producing at long intervals a few odd noises which he described as "The Blue Bells of Scotland," or "Home, Sweet Home."

Every day it became sunnier and warmer—chilblains had disappeared like magic. Regularly, alas without success, we went in for the sweepstake on the day's run. There was dancing on the boat deck to a gramophone after dinner. I longed to dance, but I didn't like to risk it, although there was only a very gentle swell. Barkie said he didn't want to. Roddie was seldom to be seen after dinner.

We began to know quite a lot of people. One of the women who had travelled with me in the boat train said to me: "*Do* tell me—we've all been wondering—are your teeth your own?"

I drew back my lips in as savage a grin as I could muster.

"Oh—they *are*," she said, in so disappointed a tone that I thought she must have lost a bet on it.

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Mrs. Blair Aitken, to whom I had not previously spoken, came and asked me if I had anywhere to stay in Lagos. I was a little surprised, and told her that we understood the Government were making arrangements, or that we should stay at an hotel.

She looked at me as though she were about to give me some advice, but finally said: "Well, if you should find yourself in any difficulties, my husband and I will be delighted to put you up for a few weeks. I don't think you will like the hotel very much."

I thanked her. It was extraordinarily kind, I thought.

On the afternoon of the sixth day the Peak of Teneriffe rose grandly from a threatening bank of clouds, and towards evening we drew near to the Islands, stopping just outside Las Palmas, where the last supplies of fresh green vegetables and salads are taken on board.

The town looked most attractive with its winking lights and background of darkening hills. A number of small traders came out and endeavoured to sell beautiful embroidered tablecloths and brilliant Spanish shawls. Cigars and cigarettes were also offered. But people returning from leave are invariably dead broke; the supplicating gestures and even the delightfully accommodating scale of prices delivered in fascinating broken English had little effect. One by one they drifted away with an air of childlike disappointment which I found quite touching.

Shortly after this, as we neared the tropics, I made a discovery which very nearly spoilt the whole trip for me.

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Most of my outfit had been purchased very hurriedly at the Army and Navy Stores. In charge of the tropical outfitting department was a benevolent-looking old gentleman in a silk hat, who assured me that ladies wore exactly the same kind of solar topees as men. He then caused a large number of these monstrosities to be produced, and eventually, feeling rather desperate, but knowing no better, I selected one—a heavy khaki affair exactly similar to those worn by soldiers—and I don't mean officers.

Now, I was horrified to observe on deck elegant broad-brimmed sun hats in becoming colours, and sporting-looking double felts with neat ribbon bands and bows. I very nearly wept with rage and mortification.

"My dear child, what on earth's the matter?" said Barkie, remarking my long face.

"I've got the wrong sort of topee," I croaked.

Barkie allowed himself a burst of unfeeling laughter and then vanished. Presently he returned with a second-hand tussore sun hat which he had obtained from the Purser. -

"Try this," he recommended, "and you shall have the best that Lagos can supply the moment we land."

"This" had seen better days, and was inclined to wobble perilously on the top of my head, but it saved me from complete humiliation. I managed to smile once more, but it was a very near thing.

Early on the morning of the 3rd January my little stewardess appeared in the cabin doorway and said:

"Please, Madam, your gentleman friend says come along up and have your first look at Africa."

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I scrambled out of my bunk and across to the porthole.

In the distance, looming mysteriously through the mist, I could see the rolling hills and curves of land.

While I was dressing, the throb of the engines suddenly ceased, and I looked out again to see Freetown right under my nose. It appeared enchanting in the early sunlight—red sandy beach and roads—pinkish and yellowish buildings—a background of hills where immense cotton trees formed a stately setting for the white severity of Government House. In the foreground a small boat approached, carrying a figure waving excitedly to somebody on deck.

After breakfast I put on my very unstable headgear and we all went ashore.

It was Sunday, and there seemed nobody but ourselves to disturb the thick red dust. We began to walk up a wide street of mud-walled, grass-thatched native habitations. Dense tropical vegetation clustered round them. A wooden palisade separated them from the road. The words "Liverpool Street" appeared incongruously in white letters on a black signpost.

Suddenly, from a tin-roofed mission hall farther down the street, came the sound of shrill native voices singing a familiar hymn tune. As we passed, we looked in at the open door. Rows of sober black faces surmounted fantastic assortments of European garments. Undisturbed by our appearance, they continued to sing with parrot-like enthusiasm.

We sauntered on up the hill to Government House, where the magnificent cotton trees towered high over

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our heads. Still no signs of life. And so, down a street of ramshackle stores, back towards the little quay. Barkie pointed out the famous establishment of Mr. Bungay, whose shutters proclaimed him "The Sympathetic Undertaker—Builder for the Living and the Dead. Why live like a fool and die like a big fool?" is his naïve exhortation. "Eat and drink good stuff." It was thrilling to see in reality what I had viewed on the screen a short time ago as part of the Prince's tour.

Three days later I found myself again on African soil—this time at Sekondi, but without the other members of the trio. Roddie said he'd had more than enough of the Gold Coast on the Prince's tour, and Barkie muttered something about having already monopolized too much of my society.

So the party was composed of a young Irish nurse and two youthful subalterns of the W.A.F.F.s and myself. None of us had ever been on the Coast before, and some person with a highly developed sense of the ridiculous had told us that there was a reservoir a few miles inland where we could picnic and bathe.

Somehow there was a blight on the expedition from the start. To begin with, we missed the company's shore-going launch and had to come to terms with a returning coal lighter. Then on the way down the ship's side one of the men, who was carrying a bull-terrier in addition to bathing kit and tea, lost his topee. Considerable excitement and an exhibition of shocking bad seamanship took place before this was recovered.

Half-way to the shore the native skipper decided that he couldn't do with us any longer, and we



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were transferred to the Elder-Dempster launch which providentially appeared and deposited us on the wharf.

The next discouragement was a considerable difference of opinion among the native clerks in the wharf office as to the departure time of the last launch out to the *Appam*. This was further complicated by the fact that none of us knew two words of their language. Finally we boiled it down to 7 o'clock, and made our way up the hill to the local garage.

It was then half-past five.

For reasons which soon became all too evident, the garage proprietor, a pale, tired-looking Cockney, was disposed to discourage a visit to the reservoir at so late an hour. Rather than expend his small store of energy in prolonged argument, however, he allowed us to pile into a battered old touring car, and himself climbed into the driver's seat. Very gingerly, like a man handling a mettlesome horse, he released the brakes. We slid down the hill for a few yards, and the engine started.

So far so good. But unfortunately, for the first mile or so the road was a rapid succession of switchbacks, and the up gradients, without exception, completely defeated the powers of our chariot. Each time she grunted to a standstill our Cockney friend climbed out and swung the handle with an air of gloomy resignation. Stately natives passed us, silent-footed, grave, and indifferent.

At the fourth stop somebody remarked that it didn't look as though we should have time to bathe.

"Bathing?" queried a voice from beneath the

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bonnet. "It ain't allowed really, though you might slip in without bein' noticed."

A new plug was fitted, and then the voice remarked laconically: "Plenty of crocodiles about."

We looked at each other. Bathing definitely off, we decided.

Once more, in a series of painful jerks, we began to stagger along the hot, dusty road. On either side were spreading trees covered with brilliant scarlet blossom, and the country looked strange and alluring in the late sunshine.

Leaving behind all signs of civilization, we followed a rough road fringed with swamps and bush. Occasionally there appeared a native village where emaciated goats and chickens nosed among the rubbish, and naked children with enormous stomachs lurched and collapsed in a droll fashion.

Presently we arrived at the foot of a steep hill dotted with bungalows. The old car plunged up valiantly and came to rest in a cloud of steam in what looked like a European settlement.

There was a tennis court surrounded by a high fence covered with a riotous profusion of purple flowers. This, I thought, must be the purple bougainvillæa which is such a valuable standby to the writers of tropical stories.

There was a sound of English voices, but not a soul appeared.

Rather half-heartedly, we collected our tea and got out of the car. Curious, that feeling that we should have been welcomed.

## *Behind the Camera*

"You ought to leave in 'arf an hour," volunteered the driver.

We moved off in a straggling group, Jimmy the bull-terrier leaping around with short, delighted barks.

Over the brow of the hill was a view which seemed oddly familiar. Except for the palm trees and the intense, brooding stillness, it might have been Virginia Water spread out below. In the distance, near the shore, two natives were fishing from a canoe.

There was not a sound nor a ripple of the water.

We gazed awhile in silence, then turned down a wide path bordered with bushes bearing a glorious crimson flower like a large convolvulus. Jimmy, in a world of novel and exciting smells, rushed to and fro.

At the bottom of the path was a bungalow encircled by a wide verandah. We peered curiously through the windows. It seemed to be an office, but there was nobody there, and we wandered round eating sandwiches and swigging condensed milk from our bottles.

The light was now fading, and the silence became faintly sinister. My companions, I realized, were strangers. Alert and watchful now, Jimmy kept close to his master's heels.

On the way up the path again there passed a native in a white suit and a red fez, carrying two hurricane lamps. I looked back and watched him light and hang them on the verandah of the deserted bungalow. Somehow it was a sad and lonely little ceremony. I imagined it as his nightly duty. No doubt it was to him a quite ordinary procedure.

## *Behind the Camera*

Regaining the top of the hill, we strolled in the opposite direction and discovered little plots of beans, beetroots and lettuce, carefully protected by palm-leaf shelters, and freshly watered.

Suddenly from among the surrounding trees a white girl appeared, followed by a little brown dog which immediately bounded forward and gave Jimmy a rapturous welcome. Jimmy received these overtures very coldly.

The girl wore a pretty summery frock, and her head was bound with a pink-flowered scarf, but her face was quite colourless. Did she live up here? It must be very lonely. Perhaps she would speak to us.

She drew nearer. Instinctively we all stopped and looked up expectantly.

She did not even glance at us, but passed on, only turning to call "Peggy!" in a clear, remote voice.

Peggy, with feminine persistence, continued to strike coy attitudes before our disdainful Jimmy.

At last one of the men picked her up and carried her to her mistress.

As the girl bent to receive her pet, a slight breeze stirred her skirts and disclosed blood-stained stockings above her mosquito boots. Is that what mosquitoes do to you? I wondered, as she disappeared into the dusk.

"I don't think I like this place," said a plaintive Irish voice, revealing the general feeling. "Let's go."

The old car behaved perfectly on the way back. Nevertheless, the last of the company's launches had departed when we reached the wharf. All that re-

## *Behind the Camera*

mained, surging up and down at the foot of the steps, was a native surf boat, its crew of gleaming, shouting negroes lit spasmodically by a single hurricane lamp on the quayside.

A mile or so from the shore, like an unattainable fairy palace, lay the ship, sounding warning notes on her siren.

There was nothing else for it.

We tumbled into this crazy craft and the crew, chattering and quarrelling, took their places on the edge of the boat, each with one foot in a kind of rope stirrup.

As we got under way, their tumult died down. Led by the helmsman, they plied their trident-shaped paddles to the tune of a mournful anthem. Their strength and rhythm was only less remarkable than the pungency of their personal odour, but it seemed that we approached our goal by inches, while the siren became more and more insistent.

The last few yards were accomplished to loud cheers from the ship's deck. The companion-ladder had been hoisted in and, as a final indignity, we had to climb into a mammy chair. This is a wooden contrivance which I can only compare to a dogcart in shape. Two people can sit in it back to back. It is let down by crane, and considerable agility is required to climb into it from a small native canoe heaving and pitching in all directions.

I was never more appreciative of a bath and change of clothing. Nothing had happened really, but the whole expedition had been fraught with small anxieties

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and disappointments, and a sense of impending disaster. I recollected that this was the coast that was known as the white man's grave, and when I joined Barkie and Roddie at dinner I vowed that I would never go ashore again without one or both of them.

For three more days the ship steamed peacefully through lazy tropical waters. Fleets of enchanting little iridescent creatures called Portuguese men-o'-war floated past. Flying-fish left an arc of glittering spray, and porpoises romped and gambolled in the dazzling sunshine. At Accra, the second port of call on the Gold Coast, swarms of naked boys came out in surf boats and dived untiringly for coppers. One announced himself ecstatically as Charlie Chaplin. Another carolled in a shrill nasal voice, "It's a biggerde, biggerde, biggerde long way to Tipperary!"

Daily it became hotter and hotter, until the cabins and bathrooms were almost unbearable and the effort of dressing and undressing reduced one to a damp, exhausted wreck. But this was more than compensated for by the after-dinner hours when we leaned over the ship's rail, talking of this and that, watching the foaming lace of the wake, while a warm, exciting wind blew through our hair and caressed our faces.

## *Chapter Three*

**O**N the 9th January we arrived at Lagos. At this time all passenger ships berthed alongside the dock at the head of the Marina, the wide and busy thoroughfare which follows the curve of the lagoon. As we steamed slowly in, Barkie pointed out to me the various important buildings on this waterfront.

First Government House—large, white, and imposing—where Sir Hugh Clifford was then in residence. Farther along, the low E-shaped building of the Secretariat. Beyond this, large private residences, the homes of important officials and wealthy merchants. Finally, the business section, where the banks, the G.P.O., and the more important stores at length gave way to the dockyard.

Through the fringe of palm trees which divided a narrow strip of sand from the Marina could be seen a constant stream of cars passing to and fro. Native clerks and messengers in immaculate white suits sped up and down on bicycles, furiously ringing their bells, as they threaded their way among pedestrians of every type and race.

This was my first sight of an African city. I don't know quite what I had expected it to be like, but at first glance it seemed disappointingly normal.

Any dreams we may have cherished of idyllic

## *Behind the Camera*

quarters placed at our disposal by a fatherly Government were speedily dispelled. A member of the Secretariat, who came aboard to meet us, said that it had been suggested that I should stay at the Bible House—an arrangement which he evidently considered immensely diverting. As to Barkie and Roddie, they must either persuade some shipboard acquaintance to put them up or go to the one hotel; this also he found himself unable to recommend.

Barkie listened gravely to this very unpromising address of welcome. Then he drew me aside. "You'd better have a word with Mrs. Aitken before she goes ashore," he said.

I hurried away to the lounge. Mrs. Aitken, surrounded by friends, was waiting with the rest of the passengers to go through the usual landing formalities.

She gave me a wise little smile.

"Well, my dear, what did they offer you? Bible House?"

I admitted it.

"I thought as much," she remarked, with the peculiar relish of one whose gloomiest forebodings have come to pass. "Never mind," she continued. "You come to me, my dear. Come as soon as you like, and stay as long as you like."

She gave me her address and telephone number and, immeasurably relieved, I returned to my unit to find that Barkie had arranged for us to retain our quarters in the *Appam* for the time being.

This little difficulty disposed of, my one idea was to get ashore and buy a suitable topee.



## *Behind the Camera*

The moment we emerged from the dockyard, dazzled by the heat and the glare from the white buildings, we were besieged by a crowd of black rascals desirous of wheedling the money from our pockets. Some wanted to hire us motor cars, others wished to enter our service as cooks, chauffeurs, stewards, or garden boys, but the majority just wanted to sell something. Carpets, grass mats, ivory beads and cigarette holders, leather work and brass were thrust under our noses at every turn till at last, in desperation, we hired a car and drove towards the stores.

One of the first things that struck me was the complete absence of shop windows. Somehow I was not prepared for this. Actually, I suppose nothing could be displayed without being ruined by the sun. Also, only strictly utilitarian shopping can be done in Lagos. There is no luxury trade. And so, when you want anything you just go up a couple of steps from the street into a large gloomy apartment like a warehouse, stacked and festooned from floor to ceiling with a most astonishing variety of objects. Lamps, china, glass, bales of cotton, motor tyres, and mangles rub shoulders with cases of tinned food, gramophones, saucepans, blankets, and tin baths. You do not say to yourself: "Well, now I'll go to the grocer's, or the stationer's, or the draper's." You just go from store to store until they cease saying "Sorry, none," and produce whatever you require.

In this manner I obtained my topee. It was a white one with a green lining, and it fitted me. And that is all there is to be said about it.

## *Behind the Camera*

"Now we must go and write our names in some books," announced Barkie, and he told the boy to drive to Government House. "Then I must attack the Secretariat."

Attacking the Secretariat proved to be a lengthy business involving innumerable interviews and the exchange of quantities of letters and memorandums. Every day, in the dust and heat, we sped up and down the busy Marina. Barkie divided his time between the Secretariat and the bank, while Roddie and I haggled with the storekeepers. Complete camp outfit had to be purchased—beds, chairs, filters, tables, lamps, table ware, towels, cleaning and laundering apparatus—all the common necessities of life, in fact. This one doubtful establishment in Lagos was the only hotel in all Nigeria. We had to be absolutely self-reliant, the same as everybody who goes up-country.

One morning Roddie and I were in the Anglo-Colonial Stores when we became conscious that high words were taking place out in the street. Four or five native voices, high-pitched and staccato, vied with each other for precedence.

We strolled over to the doorway.

In the middle of the road, surrounding a tall figure in a white suit, a small group of boys of the house-steward type was engaged in a passionate scene. Each boy, it appeared, was animated by no less than three purposes: a desire to prove, in pidgin-English, his supreme value and unsurpassed talents as a servant; a determination to reveal, as being his bounden duty,

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all the more spectacularly scandalous details of his competitors' lives and habits; and thirdly, the establishment of his right of precedence on the lines of "I found him first—no you didn't, I did," in Hausa, with these same competitors.

The "treasure trove," smiling tolerantly in their midst, was none other than our Mr. Barkas.

It was an incident very common in Lagos, and might have resolved itself in the usual manner—a curt dismissal of all concerned by the white man. But at that moment there appeared from a side-turning another boy, older and, if anything, dirtier than the rest.

The new arrival, with one glance from a pair of experienced, bloodshot eyes, apprised himself of the situation. Without further ado, he edged himself into the little assembly and let loose upon them such a torrent of language as I have never heard before or since.

Almost immediately they were silenced. Within a few seconds, muttering and glowering, they had dispersed.

The victor turned to Barkie.

"Ba kiau, Baturi," he said, with a contemptuous gesture in the direction of his departing countrymen. "No good for you. Bad men."

He produced a filthy, dog's-eared piece of paper.

"I fit to go for bush, Baturi. Cook proper. Catch good book."

Barkie looked him over. He wore a red fez and a disreputable robe that had once been white. He was

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not very young, his face was cruelly pock-marked, but he had a wide, ingenuous smile, and a lucky space between his two front teeth.

The "book" he presented was rather more ambiguous than favourable. Quite probably he had borrowed or stolen it. In any case, it was unlikely that he had the remotest idea of its contents. This is what it said:

"Owdu Kano has been my cook for eighteen months. He leaves me on account of stomach trouble—mine."

But then again, his manner was most convincingly earnest, and he had certainly proved himself to be the possessor of that rare quality, "personality."

Barkie decided to take a chance.

Owdu was our first servant and, unlike most of the others, he remained with us to the last. He gave us no cause to regret the somewhat irregular circumstances of his engagement. Indeed, he provided a good deal of innocent entertainment, one way and another.

The result of Barkie's palavers with the Government was that six free passes were allowed on the railway: three for ourselves, and three for the artistes. Free passage for native servants was also given, and free transport for all gear, both travelling with us and following after. In addition, the Government proposed to attach to the party a political officer to guide us in matters of procedure in dealing with native tribes, and to act as interpreter. The officer nominated was already

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in the Northern Provinces and would join the outfit as soon as we were ready to commence operations.

With this we had to be satisfied, and Barkie decided it was time for him to carry out his plan of seeking a suitable location in the north.

But three people without a definite destination present rather a problem in the wilds of Nigeria, especially if their movements are as erratic as those of a location hunter are bound to be. So, fully equipped with camp gear, food supplies, and typewriter, and with Owdu, very serious and important, in attendance, Barkie set off alone for the north.

Roddie, who can always be relied upon to establish himself, his gear, and his staff, if any, with the minimum of fuss, transferred himself to the bungalow of a man he had met in Lagos during the Prince's tour; and I, feeling strangely alone without Barkie, went to the home of Dr. and Mrs. Aitken, opposite the hospital by the creek at Onikan, an outlying suburb of Lagos.

Set in the middle of a large compound, and approached from either side by a semicircular drive, the house was long and white. Upstairs, two large rooms, a bedroom and the Doctor's study, opened on to a wide verandah with wooden shutters. Here my camp bed was pitched. An impromptu dressing-table and desk were rigged up and I settled myself very comfortably.

For the sake of coolness, the ground floor was one large room running the width and depth of the house. One side was used as a dining-room, the other as a

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lounge. Both opened on to a charming loggia formed by the upper verandah. Jasmine grew profusely round the pillars, while banks of ferns and tropical lilies transformed it into a cool green bower where lizards, black, orange, yellow and cream, made their sudden, swift excursions.

Here many delightful little cocktail parties took place in the evenings. Here we adjourned from the large round table with shaded lights where spotlessly clad servants deftly served meals which afterwards, in the throes of housekeeping myself, I realized to be miracles of ingenuity in a land where a housekeeper's scope is limited beyond belief.

Often we dined out in other charming homes. Once I was taken to a party given by a native journalist. After an ambitious meal of European dishes which would have taxed the powers of the most elastic city alderman, this gentleman endeavoured to interview me. Even he was preoccupied to a degree with *White Cargo*.

There was no theatre in Lagos, but an amateur concert party contrived a very lively entertainment while I was there. Odds and ends of the most atrocious junk film drew crowds of enthusiastic natives to the one cinema. Such was the extent of public amusements.

Sport was represented by a golf course, the Mecca of the white population from 4 p.m. till dusk, and a race-course, round which I drove many times on my way to the city. Bare, brown, and dusty, it bore little resemblance to the lush surroundings with which race meetings in England are associated. All the same, it

## *Behind the Camera*

was a great disappointment to me that no meeting was held during my stay.

One of the evening diversions I most enjoyed in Lagos was the drive out to the shore beyond the lagoon, where the surf thundered in, bringing a cool, refreshing breeze. After a day spent in rushing hither and thither, or struggling apoplectically with the mysteries of the telephone system, I found this the finest possible tonic.

As a guest and companion during the daytime, I must have been a great disappointment. There was so much to be done—reports to send home, accounts to keep, Barkie's telegraphed instructions to attend to, servants to engage, lists of stores to check, and so on. I knew very little about domestic economy at this time, but it did seem to me that it ought to be possible to feed three people for from four to six weeks on less than £100. This was the figure quoted for supplies sufficient to last us until Haddon Mason arrived with reinforcements from England.

From Mrs. Aitken I gained many useful hints about the management of servants and the maintenance of health. I learnt how to discourage white ants and avoid scorpions; the importance of filtering water, taking quinine, and locking things up. She also inspected my wardrobe and, on her advice, I went to an Indian merchant and bought material for extra underclothes and cotton frocks, which she helped me to make.

One morning, as we sat sewing on the verandah, Mrs. Aitken said suddenly, "Here comes a Hausa trader. Don't take any notice of him."

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I glanced up cautiously to see a gentle figure in soiled white robes walking quietly in at the compound gate.

Within a few yards of the house he stopped and, without so much as a glance in our direction, divested himself of a number of unsavoury-looking bundles, and squatted down.

We bent our heads over our work.

No word was spoken, but I observed that our visitor was producing a variety of attractive objects and arranging them carefully on the dusty ground, as though entirely for his own pleasure. When this was done to his satisfaction, he folded his hands and sat quite still, looking at nothing in particular.

We stitched away silently. Now and then a plump, orange-coloured lizard dropped from the wall and scabbled across the floor. Perhaps ten minutes elapsed. Then Mrs. Aitken looked out into the brilliant sunshine.

This was evidently a recognized sign that palaver might commence, for beneath the enormous Hausa sun hat there was an enviable display of gleaming teeth.

"Good day, Ma."

Mrs. Aitken leaned back in her chair and yawned.

"What have you got?" she enquired, with elaborate indifference.

"Plenty, Ma. Very good."

He held up a pair of soft green leather slippers and a round brass tray. The slippers were charming, and a bunch of egret feathers made my mouth water, but



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my hostess surprised me by saying contemptuously, "Rubbish, all of it."

The Hausa laughed delightedly.

"Oh no, Ma!"

He dived into his filthy garments and brought forth a handsome string of ivory beads.

"Fifteen shilling," he announced, eyeing her speculatively.

"Good gracious no!" exclaimed Mrs. Aitken in tones of exaggerated horror. "Absolute robbery. Not worth five."

This was evidently vastly amusing.

"I no robber, Ma," he said, with a rich chuckle. "I good boy; but I no fit to give you beads for five shilling." And he shook his head, as one who can appreciate a joke, but must draw the line somewhere.

"Fifteen shilling," he repeated amiably.

"Oh dear me no," said Mrs. Aitken, and bent over her work again.

Quite undismayed, he selected a brace of brightly coloured leather bags and held them out to me. "I fit to sell you these four shilling each, Ma," he offered.

"Two shillings the two," interposed Mrs. Aitken briskly.

I began to feel rather sorry for the man, and said so.

"Nonsense! The man's a thief," she interrupted me. Then to the Hausa, who was watching us critically: "You go for bush. You thief man. Palaver finish." And she resumed her sewing.

He looked at her sorrowfully, then slowly commenced to re-pack his wares. It took some time, and

## *Behind the Camera*

at intervals he held up to me hopefully a leather cushion, or one of the little brass figures, but I shook my head.

At last he rose to his feet and made polite obeisance.

"Good day, Ma," he said good-humouredly, and drifted softly away in the blazing heat.

"Don't worry," laughed Mrs. Aitken, seeing my gaze fixed commiseratingly on the retreating figure, "he thought that was grand fun. What is more, he'll be back again to-morrow, and I'll get that necklace for you for six bob!"

I thought of the miserable creatures who either whine or threaten at the back doors of England, and came to the conclusion it must be the climate.

## *Chapter Four*

NEWS from Barkie soon became extremely scrappy, and finally ceased altogether for about a week. Then came a telegram telling us to catch the next train up-country (there were only two a week at that time)—and he would meet us at Kaduna, which is the Government headquarters for the Northern Provinces.

So on the 1st February, Roddie and I, two stewards, a cook, and a vast amount of luggage and chop boxes, boarded the train at Iddo, the railway terminus, and took up the trail of our Mr. Barkas.

I had been warned that the train would be slow. It certainly was. The speed never rose above fifteen miles an hour, and at every little station and halt we stopped for at least half an hour, during which time pandemonium reigned.

The front part of the train consisted of corridor coaches and a restaurant-car for Europeans. Behind was a string of high, open wooden trucks for the natives, with whom the line appeared to be extremely popular. At each halt, those inside, whether they wished to alight or not, surged to the doors. Simultaneously, the waiting crowds on the platform hurled themselves at the train. The wildest confusion ensued—high-pitched voices were raised in violent abuse, and every doorway was a battle-field. The new-comers usually held their own, for they were fresher. In the

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end, like children, they all lost interest in the struggle, and gave themselves over to the purchase of sad-looking oily cakes, and anæmic loaves, or indulged in loud, insulting remarks regarding the harassed railway staff.

This disorderly state of affairs, rendered even more chaotic by the hysterical behaviour of certain officious gentlemen with smoking oil lamps, persisted throughout the night, so that sleep was out of the question.

Once clear of the dense jungle growth of the south, we looked out upon endless stretches of bare, dried-up country dotted with stunted trees and bushes. No more luscious green oranges—no more iced lemonades.

I was the only white woman on the train, and I had a compartment to myself. Roddie and I amused ourselves with books and a portable gramophone. We very soon discovered that, during the daytime, picnic meals in my compartment were more comfortable and appetizing than any sort of meal in the stifling heat of the restaurant-car.

Towards evening on the second day we became mildly excited at the prospect of seeing Barkie and hearing all the news. When the train jolted into Kaduna Junction at about 11 o'clock we were both hanging out of the corridor window, but there was no sign of him. Even at Kaduna North, twenty minutes later, the only white passenger in sight was an extremely large parson in a heavy ulster, who disappeared into Roddie's compartment next door.

Disappointed and puzzled, we had just rolled ourselves up in our blankets again, when a familiar voice cried:

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"Hullo, folks, how's things?"

And the doorway was filled with a radiant vision, all got up in dinner kit, and mosquito boots, with the old felt hat at a very dashing angle.

"Hullo, bo!" cried Roddie, throwing aside his rug.

"Hullo!" I echoed faintly, raising myself on one elbow and groping for my powder puff and comb.

At that time I had a great deal of very thick fair hair. In the damp heat of Lagos it had become lank and obstinately straight; all I could do was to brush it straight back into two heavy, unbecoming coils behind my ears. I had long ago given up the struggle against the dust and cinders which had poured in on us without ceasing for two days; my face and hands were filthy, and my dark brown travelling frock looked as though it had been slept in, as indeed it had. In fact, though both Roddie and I had been bursting with news an hour earlier, we now found ourselves without a word to say.

Barkie, however, had dined at the Residency, and was in the best of spirits. He had found the ideal location, he said.

Starting from Jos, which we were due to reach on the following evening, he had traversed some hundreds of miles by Ford car over bush roads, and on foot over tortuous native trails, till he came to a village called Panyam. A few tours of investigation with an intelligent Hausa guide had convinced him that this was the spot he had come five thousand miles to find. Moreover, the local tribes, the Angas and Sura pagans, while sufficiently wild and unspoilt to be picturesque,

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sported enough clothing to satisfy the British Board of Film Censors. The Government had sanctioned his choice, and he had had the good fortune to fall in with Mr. W. R. Clarke of the Keffi Consolidated Tin Mine Company, who, with true Nigerian hospitality, had invited us all to stay with him at Barricki-n-Lahadi until we were ready to move out into the bush.

We talked and talked, and the train trundled on and on. The floor of the compartment was littered with cigarette ends, and it was nearly four o'clock when we stumbled out on to the dark platform at Zaria to transfer to the narrow-gauge railway which twists and turns like an endless serpent to the heights of the Bauchi Plateau.

There was only one carriage for Europeans on this train—a long, narrow compartment furnished with six arm-chairs clamped to the floor. I felt my way in and sat down at the far end.

Backwards and forwards in the dim light of the platform passed native men and women of many types and tribes—Hausas in flowing robes, light-skinned Fulani, bushmen muffled in blankets and woollen caps. The womenfolk, with superb dignity, balanced on their heads bundles, pails, and enamel basins overflowing with odd things, while their babies slept peacefully in slings on their backs. Here and there a man of rank appeared. A princely figure in robes of gold tissue gleamed disdainfully among them.

Huddled in my chair, too cold and tired to sleep, I watched this dark pageant, and listened to the clatter of strange tongues. Far down the platform an irregular

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sprawling shape informed me that our gear was gradually being unearthed from the guard's van. Presently my solitude was broken by the entrance of the massive padre whose name, according to Roddie, was Twycross. Muttering pleasantly to himself, he selected a chair and dumped beside it a wooden chop box and a suitcase. Still grumbling away, he rolled himself up in a blanket, sat down, put his feet out of the nearest window, and immediately fell asleep.

I wished I could do the same. But now, in addition to being cold, I began to feel hungry. There was no restaurant-car on this train. I must possess my appetite in patience until our chop boxes emerged from the van.

"Chop," by the way, is one of the two most hard-worked words on the West Coast. The other is "palaver." "Chop" is a generic Coast term for food in any shape or form, and the whereabouts of the chop box is the chief anxiety of every traveller.

"Palaver" is rather harder to define. According to the dictionary it means idle talk; flattery; a conference. But there is more to it than that. The natives make palaver about anything and everything. They love to involve you in long-winded and circuitous discussions about the simplest things. The primitive tribes in the bush make palaver about war, harvest, marriage, a killing of meat. The word is also used in other curious ways. The Christian God, for instance, is described as "the God Palaver Beef that live for sky." Then, of course, there is this shocking business of "mammy palaver" about which we have heard so much.

The padre's snores and a wild desire for a cup of

## *Behind the Camera*

tea at length drove me out on to the platform where Barkie and Roddie were now superintending the loading of the gear into the new train. Owdu and the other boys had materialized and they were all hard at it. Remembering the circumstances of his engagement, I was not altogether surprised to find that Owdu had already assumed command of Jos, Kadiri, and Tom.

These three, whom I had taken over from a member of the Secretariat at Lagos, brought recommendations of an unusually promising nature. Tom was my boy. "My wife says he is an excellent lady's maid," I had been told. He was a quiet creature with a slumbrously sulky expression, neatly dressed in a khaki shirt and shorts. He never wore any sort of headgear.

Kadiri was a long-limbed, amiable boy with large hands and a wide grin. He wore a long robe and a red fez, and my recollection of him is that he always seemed to be running—either to or from some amorous entanglement, as we very soon discovered. His job was to look after Roddie.

Jos, the cook, was short and appropriately fat, as became his profession. He wore white shorts and tunic, and was arbitrary in the matter of hats. His ability as a cook had not yet been tested, but he was already revealing signs of the bad-tempered and quarrelsome nature which eventually proved his undoing so far as we were concerned.

When all the gear had been identified and our personal requirements retrieved, we made our way back to the compartment and started the spirit stove to boil the kettle.



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Another arm-chair was now occupied by a sleeping figure wrapped in a white blanket, its face, pale and weary, resting on a white pillow—a ghostly and disturbing picture in the half light.

It was bleak and grey when the train drew out at 6 a.m. The Rev. Twycross withdrew his feet from the open window and complained bitterly of the cold before composing himself for sleep once more. After an hour or so of restless shifting, we decided to have a wash and some breakfast—no mean undertaking in such close quarters.

The train crawled along its narrow rails at an average speed of eight miles an hour. On down gradients it rocked and swayed to such an extent that the only stationary objects were the clamped arm-chairs.

Daylight revealed a flat and monotonous country, broken by belts of shiny green-leaved shrubs, their bright cleanliness a refreshment to the eyes. No animals or birds were to be seen.

As the morning wore on and the heat increased, the padre and the weary one gradually emerged from their wrappings, like butterflies from their chrysalides.

Presently the padre began to talk.

From the time when, as children, my sister and I used to hide under the dining-room table while our vicar vainly rang the front-door bell, I am sorry to say I have always avoided "the cloth." Paradoxically speaking, it puts the fear of God into me.

It was with astonishment and delight, therefore, that I listened to humorous comments on the customs and exigencies of this wild, uncivilized part of the

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world. As the padre reeled off story after story, I tried to reconcile his charming personality with the monotonous voice and forbidding appearance which is the professional hall-mark of so many reverend gentlemen. It was difficult to imagine him subdued to the conventional pulpit manner; yet a sermon delivered in his present breezy fashion would certainly electrify any congregation.

Without thinking, I blurted out: "Tell me, Mr. Twycross, do you ever manage to preach a sermon without making your congregation roar with laughter?"

He looked a bit staggered, but joined heartily in the ensuing burst of amusement while, in some confusion, I tried to explain that I had meant to be complimentary. An inspired but irreverent theory that there would be far larger church attendances if an occasional joke were cracked in the pulpit only served to push me further in the mire.

The halts on this branch line were just as maddeningly frequent, and of twice the duration, the record being an hour and a half in the quivering heat of mid-day. At every stop Owdu turned up with what he evidently considered the perfect remedy for all ills and discomforts—a pot of tea made with water from the engine. As a means of passing the time it served its purpose, but it would be hard to concoct a more disgusting beverage.

In the final ascent to the Plateau, the famous hairpin bend at Jengre provided a wonderful panorama of the country in the mellow rays of the setting sun. How far it is true I do not know, but it is said that the some-

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times unaccountably meandering nature of the Nigerian railway is due to the fact that the engineers who constructed it in the early pioneering days were obliged to fill themselves with whisky to counteract the fevers and diseases that beset them, so that they were more or less drunk all the time.

Seven o'clock.

Eight o'clock.

The journey began to seem endless.

At last we ran into Jos.

Barkie leapt out into the dark confusion of convivial parties meeting friends, boys with swinging hurricane lamps, servants awaiting their masters, and the usual crowd of native onlookers to whom the bi-weekly arrival of the train was an event not to be missed. Presently he returned with a tall, rangey, weather-beaten person whom he introduced as "Clarke with an 'e,' and two Airedales." I grasped a strong hand and looked up into a typical Australian face—clean-shaven, firm mouth, hawklike nose, and far-seeing "no nonsense" grey eyes. I put him down instantly as "one of the people."

With Mr. Clarke was Captain Salt, an A.D.O. who had come out in the *Appam* with us. As it seemed likely that some time would elapse before all our stuff was clear, Captain Salt very kindly took me to his bungalow for drinks and small chop.

I had already made the acquaintance of small chop (accent on the "small") in Lagos where, under the control of the mistress of the house, it is served, or "passed" as they say, with cocktails and small drinks

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during the quarter of an hour immediately preceding dinner.

In the bachelor establishments of the Plateau, however, I was to find what can only be described as small chop rampant.

The order of events is something like this.

At sundown, the master of the house and any friends who may have dropped in fling themselves into deck-chairs on the verandah, or wherever the drinks are put ready, and the cry goes up, "Kaow small chop!" (Bring small chop.)

The humblest member of the house staff, who is known as the small boy, then appears with a dish on which are a number of inch-square pieces of toast spread with, say, anchovy. While these are being handed round, another boy serves drinks.

The small boy then vanishes, to reappear half an hour later with more pieces of toast—this time spread with hard-boiled egg.

Another interval—then sardines.

The host begins to talk vaguely of dinner.

Immediately there appears another batch. Olives this time.

Another interval. Then a further consignment spread with a mixture of the cook's own invention which, perhaps, had better remain unanalysed.

What is going on in the kitchen all this time, Heaven, and least of all the master, knows. But somewhere about 9.30 a message comes from the cook that chop is ready.

By this time there are innumerable empty glasses

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and bottles around, and nobody is disposed to be very critical of the long-awaited meal, which, in most cases, is just as well. I have no idea who conceived this diversion, but the odds are decidedly in favour of the cooks.

Captain Salt's up-to-date bungalow, with its cream-washed walls and simple furniture, was a pleasant sanctuary after the dust, heat, and confined space of the last three days and nights. I deeply appreciated the opportunity for a wash and brush-up, and the excellent small chop and small talk whiled away an hour or so very agreeably. But we returned to the station to find that the non-arrival of a lorry for the gear had necessitated a change of plans. Barkie had decided to remain in Jos overnight while Roddie and I were to go out to Barracki-n-Lahadi with Mr. Clarke.

So we shot off into the darkness with this rather stern-looking stranger. It was an open car—a Dodge—and although I had on two coats and a double blanket, I soon began to feel extremely cold. Mile after mile was covered at a dizzy speed, punctuated by a rackety passage over crazy bridges where wafts of icy air still further chilled me.

It was so dark that it was impossible to gain any idea of the surroundings, but here and there the sky-line was illumined by a distant bush fire, resembling a vast building lit up for a festive occasion.

At last the car turned off the road into a rough drive sparsely lined with shrubs, and the headlights

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picked up a long, low, white house with a thatched roof and black beams, very much like a Shropshire farm-house.

Weary and stiff with cold, mind and body aching for sleep, I climbed out of the car and stumbled up three steps into a lounge—down a passage—past a large room where a round dining-table seemed to await the operations of a large number of people—and so into a small lounge with a roaring fire and a roaring gramophone.

Three men rose with glasses in their hands.

I cannot recall their faces—I never knew who they were—at the time they seemed like a young army. Dogs came sniffing round. Two Airedales jumped up and licked me.

I was then shown to my room—a lofty apartment containing two iron bedsteads, leagues apart, a wardrobe, a chest of drawers, and a mirror before which stood a round bamboo table covered with a dark red cloth. An oil lamp, which left the corners in darkness, gave the room an eerie atmosphere.

Hastily tidying up, I mused on my strange position—the only white woman for goodness knows how many miles, dumped down in a bachelor establishment with five men and numerous dogs.

I groped my way back to the lounge and Mr. Clarke announced chop.

How I got through that meal I do not know, but I was conscious that five male creatures had waited till nearly midnight for their dinner, that in appearance I was far from being worthy of this compliment,

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and that I must prod my flagging senses into some semblance of brightness and animation.

I cannot have been very successful, for I heard Mr. Clarke say to Barkie next day, "She just ate her dinner and then kind of faded away!"

## *Chapter Five*

THE disconsolate potterings of Pankshin, the small shaggy dog who had been detailed to sleep with me, roused me soon after daybreak next morning.

My room, I discovered, was in the front of the house; its windows looked straight up the drive where a few thick-stemmed frangipane bushes, without grace of line or leaf, put forth their fragrant clusters of pale, waxlike blossom.

To the right of this window, and at right angles to it, was a door which I had not noticed before. It opened on to a small sort of outhouse containing a tin bath and an old chair.

Pankshin looked up hopefully at yet another door. I opened it, and the freshness and sparkle of the morning air drove away the last remnants of sleep.

I shall never forget that first sight of the Plateau.

I gazed and gazed on an endless vista of rolling plains, dry and brown, broken only by a thin ribbon of road which lost itself in the distance. In the sky, delicate tints of green and primrose were fading before the rosy warmth of the rising sun. Away to the right there rose suddenly a chain of hills, their rugged outlines blurred with mist, while on the lower slopes little groups of round, grass-roofed huts clustered comfortably together. Straggling herds of Fulani sheep and cattle grazed gently in the valley. There was no



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human creature in sight, and the only sounds came from the distant herds.

Barracki-n-Lahadi was a sizable camp. In addition to Mr. Clarke's house, which was well built and cement-floored throughout, there was quite a little street of storehouses, native quarters, workshops and offices, and a large open shelter for cars. At the top of this street, which sloped gently upwards from the house, another smaller house was occupied by two Englishmen also employed by the Keffi Company.

Mr. Clarke soon showed himself to be a thoroughly sporting and considerate host; that is to say, having told us where to sleep, eat and work, he left us to ourselves. If we wanted any information, advice or help, it was given instantly and in the most practical manner, but we were never made to feel we were visitors.

Among the white men in the outlying districts of Nigeria there exists a wonderful spirit of camaraderie and good-fellowship. Every man literally keeps open house—his bed, his beer, everything he has is yours without even the formality of asking. No man ever passes another's house without looking in to see if there is anything he can do, any beer he can drink, any message or commission he can execute if he is going to the nearest town.

But even in a country where no man knows who or what may turn up next, a party of film people, wanting all kinds of impossible things at the most unsuitable moments, is a severe strain. Bill Clarke never blinked an eyelid. He was as cheery and unperturbed on the

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day we left as on the day we arrived. Swinging his ash stick, and with his two Airedales, Jimmy and Curly, close at his heels, he strode about the camp; or, with the dogs bouncing about in the back, disappeared in a cloud of dust in the Dodge. We seldom saw him, except at mealtimes, and not always then.

Naturally, Roddie and I were all agog to explore the country where Barkie had decided to work. A week-end shooting party had already been arranged for that purpose.

On Mr. Clarke's advice I now assumed, not without misgivings, some more of my outfit from the Army and Navy Stores. Happily, my tussore shirt, khaki twill riding breeches, thick boots and puttees, received general approval. For my part, I had already decided that there is no more attractive garb for a man than khaki shorts and a bush shirt.

Our destination was the resthouse at Vodni, a distance of thirty-five miles from the camp. This does not sound very far; on a Nigerian bush track it *feels* like three hundred and fifty. The wheels of the Dodge sank into deep sandy ruts, bumped over enormous boulders, and clung with miraculous precision to the most dangerous-looking temporary bridges.

In this manner we journeyed for miles through rolling bushland, stunted trees, and ant-heaps six feet in height, with an ever-changing yet ever-similar background of rough, saw-backed mountains, lifting grim heads crested with solitary palm trees to the

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hazy blue sky, their shoulders strewn with giant rocks and boulders.

At first glance these ranges seemed to be deserted, but closer inspection revealed signs of human occupation—tortuous trails, snaking their way up among the rocks and tangled growths of cactus, led the eye to little groups of round mud huts, so cleverly placed that they almost merged into the landscape.

Here and there a few figures could be seen threading their way up or down. Others, following the main track, stood aside as the car approached. As we drew level, each performed a curious stooping obeisance and murmured "Zaki!" (Lion)—a flattering courtesy which, with the spreading of civilization, is rapidly dying out. Response to this gesture being, unhappily, quite inadvertent owing to the roughness of the road, it was impossible fully to savour the royal feeling engendered.

The majority of the men wore a loin-cloth or some kind of animal skin twisted round them, but many were completely naked. Almost without exception they carried weapons—ugly-looking barbed spears, rough hatchets, hunting-knives, and bows and arrows.

I was much intrigued by the picturesque effect many of the women achieved by attaching just below the waist, fore and aft, so to speak, a large bunch of glossy green leaves which enabled them, when walking, to adopt a very saucy swagger.

Both men and women were sturdy and well formed, the young girls, with their rich colour, flashing teeth, and ripe outstanding breasts, being specially attractive.

## *Behind the Camera*

It was getting on for teatime when, after successfully negotiating a narrow plank bridge at the bottom of a deep culvert, and passing through a flat belt of palm trees, we stopped before a large resthouse at the junction of four roads.

"Behold your future home," said Barkie, as we all got out of the car. "This is Panyam."

I beheld an oblong-shaped mud building whose thatched roof was prolonged to form a wide shady verandah. The back of the resthouse faced one of the roads. The front, or verandah side, gave on to a sketchy attempt at a garden. This much I took in before my attention was diverted to an interesting scene taking place round the back and near side of the resthouse.

A large crowd of pagans, comprising some hundred men and boys, were seated on the ground, cross-legged, like a class of school-children. In the shade of the house a white man sat at a table which was covered in papers, his interpreter and orderly standing on either side of him. He was an A.D.O. engaging labour for the construction of a new road. One at a time, as their names were called by the interpreter, the pagans rose and stood before him. Very young, he looked, and very hot and exasperated. But when he saw us he came forward eagerly, and I recognized him as one of the young men who had travelled out with us. This was his first tour, and he was evidently not finding things too easy. Mr. Clarke made the necessary introductions, and said we would like to look over the resthouse, which the A.D.O. was then occupying.

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He told us to go ahead, but excused himself from accompanying us.

From the garden, or compound, four shallow steps flanked by posts smothered in purple bougainvillæa, that preposterous inevitable climber, led on to the verandah. Thence one passed into a square open space, at the back of which a doorway led through to a sort of corridor running the width of the house at the back. On the left of this square space, which contained a large wooden table, were narrow double doors leading into a room with one small square hole for a window. This looked on to the verandah. At the far end of this room was another doorway leading into a very small room having no window at all. Owing to the fact that the thatched roof sloped down to within two feet of the low mud wall of the verandah, both these rooms were extremely dark. Nevertheless, they were hailed as ideal accommodation for our leading lady and me.

On the right of the central square space, which became our dining- and living-room, was a room similar in size to the left-hand one, except that there was no door and, instead of windows, an archway was cut out on three sides of it, the back wall only being solid. Grass mats over these openings afforded a certain amount of privacy, and this was to become the bedroom of Roddie, Haddon Mason, and Reggie Fox. Barkie, who adores discomfort, announced that when the time came, his bed would be erected in the back corridor.

On the other side of the road, at the back of the rest-

## *Behind the Camera*

house, was another round house. This, it was decided, might be allotted to the political officer who was joining us. No doubt he would find it an advantage to be able to get away from us sometimes. Several small huts for servants, a cookhouse, and an open square hut for a car completed the little camp.

When we had explored all the possibilities and returned to the car, we were all agreed that Panyam resthouse would be an ideal headquarters. But for the present, our destination was Vodni, and Mr. Clarke turned the car down a road, every boulder, bush, and tree of which was to become familiar in the ensuing months.

Vodni resthouse stands in the middle of the bush road from Panyam to Pankshin, at the top of a slight rise. It is a circular building three parts surrounded by a verandah, and having, like Panyam and, indeed, all Nigerian resthouses, earth walls and a grass roof. The one room boasts a wooden door and two earthen projections from the wall which might be used respectively as dressing-table and seat. High up on the wall is an aperture about eighteen inches square for ventilation.

At a little distance to the left of this building is the usual group of smaller huts for servants. One or two attractively placed bushes and immense boulders completed a piece of pictorial composition which was exactly what Barkie had in mind for some of the scenes in the fresh scenario on which we were already at work.

With Panyam as our headquarters only five miles

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away, it seemed as though the luck was with us. Rest-houses, which are the colonial substitute for hotels, are seldom to be found quite so close together as this. They are open, of course, to any white person on trek, but are mostly used by the district officers who are continually patrolling the territory under their control. The Government appoints a native caretaker, known as the Sariki Bariki, whose duty it is to keep the little camps swept and tidy and in good repair. During occupation he provides firewood and water.

Mr. Clarke had sent his boys on ahead. Deck-chairs were already arranged invitingly on the verandah; a table was laid for dinner, although it was only four o'clock. In the shade a camp bath full of water contained a tempting array of amber-coloured bottles.

The first consideration of our host, however, as a good sportsman, was to make use of the remaining daylight. He and Roddie immediately seized guns and, with a couple of pagan boys and Jimmy, the tireless Airedale, set off to see what they could bag for the pot, leaving Barkie and me to amuse each other.

Barkie is always intensely interested in the lives, habits, and occupations of any community in which he may find himself. A gift for languages and a remarkable memory further enable him to store up in a few hours an amount of knowledge which most people would fail to acquire in a similar number of months.

Over tea and biscuits in the shade of the verandah I learned some astonishing details about the apparently happy and harmless people among whom we had decided to dump ourselves.

## *Behind the Camera*

"These fellows," began Barkie, cocking a speculative blue eye at me, "are cannibals."

"You don't say!" I returned vulgarly, thinking I detected yet another instance of the leg-pulling to which I had been all too easy a victim ever since we left home. "Now tell me your other story."

But this, it turned out, was no joke. It was a solemn fact, supported by many grim and terrible instances during the past decade.

Only eight years before the time of which I write, the political officer of a district just at the foot of the Plateau ventured among a hostile tribe. To show his pacific intentions he laid aside his arms and ordered his Hausa escort to do the same.

For his pains he was brutally murdered with all his men save two.

At about the same time a mining surveyor was warned by another tribe that his white boundary flags were offending their Ju-ju.

He carried on with his job—and they removed the flags.

The surveyor replaced them, but eventually he was attacked and done to death with every refinement of cruelty—presumably to appease the wrath of the outraged Ju-ju.

In 1918, one Langkuk was King of the Angas pagans, with powers over some neighbouring tribes, not including the Sura. He was not a very popular old gentleman, but he had a useful "medicine" which was alleged to render him proof against any spear, arrow, or knife-thrust, and this was implicitly believed



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in even by the tribes whose necks chafed under his yoke.

One day, however, they summoned up courage to revolt against his tyranny; he was seized and, in deference to his "medicine," trussed up like a fowl and boiled in a huge earthenware pot.

Cannibalism has always been rife on the Plateau. Undoubtedly it exists to-day in the very regions where we were about to start work. The nature of the country precludes all possibility of stopping it by proclamation, and in spite of sharp punishment when cases are discovered, it still goes on. True, it is mostly applied to the remains of defunct relations. The custom of anthropophagy is in many cases a religious observance, certain parts of the body being set aside for certain members of the tribe. And then, again, there is proof that some tribes believe that with a man's flesh his good qualities also are assimilated. But where death and burial are not considered of importance, who can say what actually happens?

When we had finished our tea, Barkie called to the dogari, or native policeman, who was now attached to us, and explained that we should like to visit a pagan village. Two pagan boys were enlisted as guides, and my boy Tom made the party up to six.

In single file we turned off the road on to one of the narrow paths into the bush. First the two pagans, then Barkie and myself, followed by Tom, with the dogari bringing up the rear.

This latter gentleman, I may say, moved in great splendour. He wore a scarlet twill turban and a scarlet

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twill robe with vertical stripes of white let in all round from the waist downwards. Round his bare feet and ankles there slumped inelegantly a pair of very dirty white trousers, and he carried a native sword and a Bornu boomerang. These weapons, oddly enough, were robbed of any terrifying properties they may have been supposed to possess by the persistently amiable expression on his round black face.

Twisting and turning, and gradually climbing, we followed the path for about a mile until, turning a corner, we were pulled up short by a dense cactus hedge towering above us.

To make sure that everything was all right, Barkie went on through a narrow opening with the two pagans, leaving me with Tom and the dogari. It was rather like waiting to enter the maze at Hampton Court.

After about ten minutes he returned, and I followed him in among a small group of closely packed huts. Two or three ponies and some goats roamed in the confined space, children rolled in the dust, a giggling woman sat over a fire.

This was the outer village.

It did not smell in the least like Hampton Court.

The two pagan boys, who, by the way, were completely naked and exceptionally handsome, led the way on through a maze of paths hedged on either side with cactus which frequently met overhead, forming a dark, death-dealing tunnel. As a defensive barrier, the cactus has unrivalled natural advantages, for, apart from its impenetrability, it contains a milky juice

## *Behind the Camera*

which constitutes a very powerful irritant. Moreover, a scratch from one of its ugly thorns sets up a painful local poisoning. If any of the fluid gets into the eyes, it induces complete blindness.

Should the enemy successfully evade the snares and pitfalls of the cactus alleys, the besieged pagan has one more trick up his sleeve. It is a very simple idea, and yet another example of the manner in which primitive man can use Nature for his own ends.

At the entrance to most villages, above the maze of cactus hedges, stand rows of clay hives. In the event of the enemy penetrating to their very gates, the defenders seal up the hives with plugs of clay, shake them vigorously until the imprisoned bees are humming with fury, and then hurl them down on the attacking forces, to burst in their midst with all the moral effect of a shrapnel shell.

At length we emerged round a corner between two tremendous rocks, in the village proper. This consisted of two irregular lines of round huts—about a dozen in all. Above and around, the dark fringe of cactus threw odd slabs of shadow on their grass roofs. The huts were joined one to another, presenting blank, inhospitable walls, ochre-coloured, and separated by a central alley scarcely wide enough for two people to walk abreast. Pinned to the walls, a testimony to the hunting skill of the inmates, were skulls and bones of animals. Only a few years before, grimmer trophies than these were proudly displayed in every compound, for a man was not a man until he had taken a human life.

## *Behind the Camera*

The headman of the compound, who is called the galadima, came forward, and through the medium of the dogari the necessary compliments were exchanged. The galadima was a tall, well-made creature in the prime of life. He wore a sweat-laden loin-cloth bound round with leather thongs, through which was thrust an ugly-looking knife. Round his neck, suspended from a narrow thong, were a number of leather-covered amulets or ju-jus, and on his head he wore a gnome-like pointed cap of plaited grass which extended above his forehead in a long, upward-curving tongue. He received us courteously, but without enthusiasm, and stood aside watchfully when we began to look round.

As we moved forward, one or two children, ungainly with immense umbilical ruptures, gave a wide stare and staggered off into hiding. A young girl, standing by a waist-high mud urn, pounding grain with a rounded length of wood taller than herself, smiled shyly and turned her head away.

We passed on down the narrow alley. Squatting on a flat boulder, a young man was weaving with swift, skilful fingers a grass mat which would probably be sold to a Hausa trader. Near by, a woman with a baby at her breast glanced up with disinterested eyes, indifferent to the flies that buzzed and settled around herself and the child.

A pleasant tinkle of harplike music came from a small flat instrument, oblong in shape, made of reeds bound together with grass, and having strips of gut slightly raised from the main structure by a neatly contrived bamboo bridge. The player, a handsome

## *Behind the Camera*

youth with magnificent teeth, held the instrument before him with both hands, and produced the sounds by running his thumbs alternately across the strings. There was no tune; just a thin minor jumble of notes, played with rhythmical monotony.

Samples of the staple item of native food were brought. This was a peculiar-looking soggy mess like dirty porridge, with a name that sounded like a sneeze—"atcha."

The galadima, hovering round with several henchmen in attendance, signified that we might inspect the interiors of the huts. Only a few had doorways, and these were nothing more than holes. Stooping, we found ourselves in a semi-darkness filled with acrid smoke. In the middle of the floor was a smouldering fire by which sat a very old man. The skin hung in folds and wrinkles on his emaciated form. He took no notice whatsoever of our entry, but continued to puff at his long, evil-smelling pipe and gaze out through the doorway, perhaps deploring the passing of the good old days before the white man came to impose his fantastic ideas of law and order, and remove all zest from the life of a self-respecting cannibal.

Through an opening in the wall on the far side of this first hut could be seen a further chamber containing a mare and her tiny foal. Cautiously we groped our way past into another room which was reserved for the wives of the galadima. Beyond that again was a hut given over to sheep and goats. Here, tucked away in a corner and jealously guarded, was a long urn-shaped mud bin holding the corn supply of the community.



DAWIYA



YILKUBA THE WITCH DOCTOR

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## *Behind the Camera*

Many generations of experience of the effects of famine have bred in the pagan a shrewd native prudence, and he stores in his bins enough grain to last him for a whole year, if necessary. So deeply rooted is this instinct that to-day, in spite of a growing realization of the power of money, he resolutely refuses to sell any grain if he can possibly avoid it.

The combination of animal and human odours mixed with smoke was so suffocating that we issued from this incredible suite of apartments with streaming eyes and a profound longing for the wide open spaces. The galadima and his men escorted us to the boundary of the domain where, with further mutual compliments, we parted. The sun was setting behind the hills, thin columns of blue smoke rose unexpectedly from invisible villages high among the rocks, and we breathed deeply of the cool evening air.

Back at the resthouse there were scenes of great activity. Mr. Clarke and Roddie had returned with three enormous kob, which lay on the ground surrounded by a mob of excited boys. Game is very scarce on the Plateau, and such a large capture filled them with joyful anticipation of gastronomical pleasures to come.

When we had duly admired the beasts, a species of antelope with twisted tapering horns, the boys, with much high-pitched chattering, fell to skinning and cutting up the carcasses.

Quickly the darkness came down. Hurricane lamps were lit and hung on the verandah. In the inner room my bed had been erected and a canvas bath containing



## *Behind the Camera*

a small quantity of muddy water stood ready for use. Tom came to remove my heavy boots and puttees and put out my mosquito boots. This kind of service was a luxury, and I revelled in it.

Outside, the clink of glasses and sudden hiss of the soda "sparkleg" cut into the persistent harsh undertone of the crickets. Somebody started the gramophone. The tune was one of my favourites—"Waitin' for the Moon." I felt extraordinarily happy and excited. Here was I, in the heart of the African bush, on the threshold of an adventure such as few girls are privileged to experience. And three years ago—well, if I had to go through all that in order to attain this, how very much worth while it had been, I reflected. And in this exalted mood I pulled on my boots and stepped out on to the verandah, where Roddie was busy cleaning a gun.

"Here, Roddie," I cried, "put down that gun and come and dance with me! I want to see if I *can* still dance!"

"Right you are, Auntie Nat," said Roddie softly.

He rose and held out his arms, and on the rough ground outside the resthouse my feet fell once again, a little stiffly and uncertainly, into the movements of a foxtrot. I was so delighted that it was all I could do not to start howling. But an excellent bush dinner soon restored my equanimity, and more dancing afterwards put me right on top of the world.

By ten o'clock all was quiet. Tucked up beneath my mosquito net in the little round room, I felt as safe as the Bank of England. Round the verandah outside,

## *Behind the Camera*

the beds of the three men had been put up. Jimmy slept curled in a chair beside his master.

I must have been asleep for some hours when a sudden furious barking woke me.

"Shut up, Jimmy!" I heard Mr. Clarke say peremptorily. "Come *here!*"

Just that. Nothing more. I turned over lazily and went to sleep again, but Death had been prowling very close to Jimmy. If there is one meal a leopard enjoys more than another, it is a nice well-fed English dog.

Having decided on Vodni resthouse as a suitable location and Panyam as an ideal base, the next thing to do was to visit the District Officer of the Division, outline plans, and consult him as to ways and means of handling the Angas and Sura tribes without jeopardizing the peaceful conditions maintained by him.

Pankshin, the headquarters of the Division, was only fifteen miles farther on. So on the afternoon of the following day Barkie decided to drive there and take me with him, in case it might be necessary to make any notes.

Beyond Vodni the country opens out into a vast plain at the end of which there rises abruptly another chain of hills. On the top of the foremost hill stands the Residency of Pankshin. Towards it the intending visitor makes an ant-like progress. There is no cover to shield his approach; indeed, he is liable to be identified at a distance of some miles, for the D.O. has a powerful telescope in his office.

## *Behind the Camera*

But this was Sunday afternoon. Nobody challenged us on the steep road which wound round the hill. We wandered, amazed and enchanted, through a lovely garden where roses and carnations bloomed in profusion, although the dry season was at its height. There was a beautiful rock garden, well-kept lawns and shady trees, tennis and squash courts and, of course, archways covered with foaming masses of purple bougainvillæa.

The house itself was low and flat, built in native fashion with mud, but having unusually thick walls. The façade was punctured by a level row of holes about a foot square, spaced equally apart, to admit light and air. Above the central doorway a slight porch was formed into twin peaks breaking the flatness of the outline.

"The very place for our hero to live in," said Barkie, enthusiastically visualizing camera angles.

Still unchallenged, we entered the dim coolness of a comfortable bachelor lounge. There were several arm-chairs and a large divan generously supplied with cushions and sheltered by a screen over which there sprawled a superb leopard skin. Native grass mats covered the mud floor and hung, decorated with humorously crude cartoons, from the roof. Cretonne curtains covered several doorways. A bookshelf groaned beneath assorted novels above a desk in a state of the wildest confusion.

"Anybody at home?" called Barkie.

No reply. Three beautiful Persian cats strolled in and gazed at us with insolent, indifferent amber eyes.

## *Behind the Camera*

"Boy!" shouted Barkie, and in a few moments a steward appeared.

Soon we were deep in discussion with Mr. Lawrence, who was shortly going on leave, and Captain Mackenzie, who was taking over the Division in his absence. They had already received official notification of our intended filming activities, and were ready with many valuable suggestions. From them we first learned of that venerable old gentleman the Sarikin Tsafi, or witch doctor, of Pankshin, who was to play one of the leading parts in the film. Musa Katagum, the Government messenger and interpreter, of whom much will be heard, was also loaned to us by Pankshin Division.

During a lull in the conversation at teatime I made another of my famous *faux pas*. With a covetous eye on the leopard skin hanging over the screen, I observed, "I've been admiring your skin, Mr. Lawrence."

For some seconds the wretched remark hung in mid-air. Then a startled voice replied, "Oh—er—h'm—yes!"

Too late, I realized that the unfortunate man was clad in a short-sleeved shirt, open to the waist, and shorts exposing rather more than two-thirds of his thighs.

It was a long time before I heard the last of this.

## *Chapter Six*

WITH definite locations in view, a wider knowledge of the daily life of both the native and European population of the Plateau, and a promise of every assistance and co-operation from Pankshin, it now became possible for Barkie to devote himself seriously to a detailed scenario.

For the next couple of weeks we were hard at work from 8 a.m. till long after sundown, except for one week-end when Barkie disappeared into the bush with Owdu.

On the Monday morning, as I was walking up to the store hut, I met him.

"Hullo, Barkie! Want any breakfast?"

"You bet. How are you, s'Webb. Any news?"

"Nothing much," I replied, turning to walk back to the house with him. "Went to a bush dinner party on Saturday night. Most extraordinary food I've yet encountered. I must say I'm getting a bit tired of the taste of the ground nut oil they use for cooking. And you should have seen the sweet! Tinned pears covered with grey-coloured beaten white of egg decorated with hard-boiled eggs cut in half. The host's face was a study when his boy began to hand it round."

Barkie laughed. "D'you feel all right? That's the main thing."

## *Behind the Camera*

I assured him that I did, and continued to babble.

"Been having a terrible time sorting out the chop boxes. I can't think what on earth we're going to do with all this Eno's and Andrews' Liver Salts."

"You'll see!" replied Barkie, a trifle grimly. "We'll all have hobnails on our livers before very long. Tinned food is the very devil."

"I suppose so," I assented, as we entered the dining-room. "And what have you been up to?"

"Well," said Barkie, slowly removing his topee, "I've come across a marvellous pagan chief near Panyam who'll be just the type for Dawiya, and I've also seen Mackenzie's witch doctor. If only we can get the stuff out of them they'll be a riot."

"Splendid!" I exclaimed, looking up from my operations with the teapot. "But what on earth has happened to your hair?"

Barkie grinned. "It was this way, you see," he said, running an apologetic hand over his shaven head. "My bonce was getting to look a bit shaggy-like, and Owdu told me he was a first-class barber, so I gave him the clippers and told him to go ahead. It seemed a good idea at the time. But when I looked in the mirror I found he'd made such a howling mess of me that I took the clippers myself and shaved the lot off. Very hygienic, you know."

"Hygienic or not, I can't bear it," I cried, gazing at him with a sort of horrified fascination. "You look just like a German Jew. I'm going up to the store

## *Behind the Camera*

hut to recover. You'll find me there when you want me."

But to return to the scenario. I think perhaps at this stage a brief synopsis of the plot may lend additional interest to the history of its production. So here it is. Be kind to it. Remember that we had only three artistes, a very limited amount of time and money at our disposal, and no possibility whatever of transporting our native players to the studio in England. I will give it the title it eventually received, though at this stage it had not been decided on.

### "PALAVER"

The story opens on Captain Peter Allison, a young Nigerian political officer at ease in a deck-chair on the verandah of one of the resthouses in his district—Vodni, to be exact. The swift African dusk is just descending and he is idly and rather mournfully playing some all-too-familiar gramophone records while his cook prepares the evening meal.

Meanwhile, about half a mile away on the rough and dusty bush track, Jean Stuart, a nursing sister on her way back to the hospital after visiting a sick man, is in trouble with her car. Her native chauffeur and his small assistant prod the engine and crank the starting handle ineffectively. At last, exasperated, she investigates the petrol tank and finds it bone dry. Angrily she orders the driver to round up some natives who are enjoying the spectacle, and push the car to

## *Behind the Camera*

the nearest resthouse. She is new to the country, and sixty miles from her destination, but she is not afraid, and in a few minutes she is back in the car and the crowd of chattering boys and men get it into motion.

All goes well for a quarter of a mile or so; then there is a muttering and slackening of speed. Finally they come to a standstill and the driver informs Jean that the men want to be paid. It is hard work, they say.

By now it is almost dark, and she is beginning to feel a little apprehensive. She produces some money and gives it to the spokesman of the little crowd, who immediately puts it in his own pouch. At once the others crowd round with outstretched hands, and she shrinks back into the car, alarmed.

At this point the clamour reaches the ears of Allison, who strides on to the scene demanding to know what the devil all the row is about. He is astonished to find a woman in the car. The crowd of natives melts away at his appearance, for his authority is known and respected; and Jean, thankful beyond words, gets out of the car and together they go towards the resthouse.

She needs little persuasion to join Allison in his evening meal, for she is tired and hungry. But when the question of completing her journey arises, it appears that she is no better off than before. Allison is journeying on horseback and, unless by some remote chance another traveller passes that night, there is no possibility whatever of obtaining more petrol.



## *Behind the Camera*

Jean protests strongly when she realizes that she must occupy Allison's bed, and he sleep in a chair on the verandah, but there is evidently nothing else for it, so she graciously accepts.

They have been immediately attracted towards each other, and we leave them chatting, the best of friends, while the scene changes to the shack of Mark Fernandez, a gentleman of doubtful reputation, in fact a very shocking fellow, who is in charge of a small tin mine some ten miles or so away.

All is not well with Mr. Fernandez. His appearance and surroundings are slack and untidy, there are far too many bottles and glasses about and, if further proof is needed, an extract from his mail will suffice. From his manager in London he reads:

"... There has been a consistent falling off in the results from the mine of late. You are producing far short of the quantity which you undertook to deliver per month and, failing a substantial increase in tin returns, we shall have no alternative," etc. . . .

Next morning, at Vodni, Allison rises from his improvised bed early and quietly, takes his gun and goes out to see if he can get a little game.

At about the same time Fernandez, spurred to activity by his manager's letter, leaves his mine on a small Ford lorry with a load of tin for the railhead.

A little later Jean wakes up and lies for a while reviewing the exciting and pleasurable events of the previous evening. She gets up, and is pottering about

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the room when she hears the sound of a car pulling up, followed by a voice calling Allison.

Fernandez, seeing Allison's kit around with his name on it, and following the custom of the country, strides across the verandah and into the circular room where Jean stands in Allison's pyjamas. They are both so surprised that they simply stare at each other. Then Fernandez, with a mock bow and a murmured apology, turns and retraces his steps. He is highly amused. This will be a good tit-bit for some of his pals.

Jean, however, suddenly thinks of her need of petrol. She runs out after him and explains the situation. Fernandez says, "Why, certainly, Mrs. Allison."

This is an embarrassing turn of events, but Jean manages to explain who she is and why she is there. Fernandez's lifted eyebrows and quizzical smile do not help matters, but he produces a can of petrol, makes his adieux, and drives off.

Allison, on his return, gives a little whistle of dismay when he learns who is the donor of the petrol.

Fernandez has lately experienced some difficulty in getting native labour for his mine and, realizing the imperative need of an increased output of tin, he sends for Dawiya, the King of the Sura tribe of pagans in whose territory his mine lies.

Dawiya arrives with Yilkuba, the Sura witch doctor. After the usual compliments have been exchanged, Fernandez offers Dawiya a glass of gin, while Yilkuba

## *Behind the Camera*

looks on and shakes his head in grim foreboding. But Dawiya is a virile and enterprising gentleman. He likes the sample and asks for more. Then Fernandez tells him that for every week during which he gets two hundred labourers to work for him, Dawiya shall have four bottles of the fire water. Ignoring the solemn warnings of Yilkuba, Dawiya agrees.

A week or so later, Allison goes to visit a friend who is in the hospital at Jos. He meets Jean again, and she renews her promise to attend with him a dance at the club on the following evening.

At the dance Fernandez, rather the worse for drink, chaffs Allison about the incident at the resthouse, and a definite enmity is established between the two men.

In his efforts to increase his output, Fernandez approaches the manager of the principal tin mine of the district for the loan of some shovels. The manager agrees, and calls his assistant to give the necessary orders. When Fernandez has gone, the assistant informs him that he recognizes Fernandez as one Simmonds who, five years earlier, was run out of the country for peddling gin to natives.

During the course of another tour of his district, Allison receives a complaint of cattle-stealing and decides to make investigations. The trouble seems to come from Dawiya's territory. Dawiya himself is discovered dead-drunk, and Allison finds clues to the source of the liquor supply.

At a table in the compound of his shack Fernandez is weighing and paying for the tin brought to him by natives who are grouped around. One man, on receiv-

## *Behind the Camera*

ing his money, protests that he is underpaid. Fernandez rises from his chair and threatens the man, who sheers off with an evil scowl. Allison arrives and taxes Fernandez with supplying drink to Dawiya. He produces evidence and warns Fernandez that it must stop at once. There is an ugly scene between the two men, but Allison manages to keep his temper.

Things are going very badly for Fernandez. He is drinking far too much, his house boys are lazy and inefficient, his home filthy, and the food almost uneatable. Added to which he is still unable to get sufficient tin.

We next see him, untidy and unkempt, in the paddock of his mine one morning. He stands by the edge of the cut looking down at the workers. They are few and are not putting much pep into their job. The man whom Fernandez cheated at the tin buying is standing idle. Fernandez flies into a rage and swears at the man, who stares back insolently and says, "You no fit to pay me proper, I no fit to work proper." Fernandez, consumed with anger, aims a terrific blow at the man and sends him rolling down the bank in a cloud of dust.

Fernandez turns and climbs the bank. It seems to be an effort, and on reaching the top he sways and falls to the ground.

The headman hurries up with others and they carry him back to his shack, where he just has time to scribble a note to the hospital before collapsing.

The same evening Allison and Jean are out riding. They have become very friendly—in fact it is abund-

## *Behind the Camera*

antly clear that they are in love with each other. Allison takes her to a pagan village. They dismount and, threading the maze of cactus hedge which surrounds it, they inspect the curious domestic arrangements, the fat staggering babies, goats, chickens, and precious ponies all hobnobbing together in the confined space among the round mud huts.

They remount and are turning towards home, when a native messenger comes galloping up with a note in a cleft stick. It is a request from the hospital for Jean to go at once to Fernandez's shack, where he is seriously ill.

Late that night, Fernandez, still in his working kit, lies tossing feverishly on his camp bed. A hurricane lamp dimly lights the squalor and untidiness of the room.

Jean appears in the doorway. Quickly she takes in the situation and sets to work to make the sick man comfortable and reduce the chaos to order.

While Fernandez is fighting for his life, Allison at his headquarters at Pankshin receives a notification from the Secretary of the Nigerian Protectorate that he is to make himself responsible for the immediate removal from the country of Mark Fernandez, otherwise known as Mark Simmonds.

Under Jean's competent hands, Fernandez returns slowly to health, and at length the day comes when he must fend for himself once more. She has come to like him, and he is a changed man, and deeply in love with her. Before she leaves he promises to keep off drink and look after himself properly.

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At the first favourable opportunity, Jean pleads with Allison to be friendly towards Fernandez. Everyone is against him, she says. Allison, knowing what he does, feels unable either to grant her request or explain his refusal, and Jean goes away hurt and disgusted with him.

We next see Fernandez on his return from the day's work. He is neat and fairly well groomed, and is evidently doing his best to keep up to the mark. Awaiting him is a note from Allison advising him of the Government's orders that he must leave the country. Fernandez is furious. He sees in this a plot on the part of Allison to get him out of the way and destroy his chances with Jean.

Allison goes to see Jean at her bungalow near the hospital to try to make up their little difference and persuade her not to see any more of Fernandez. He will give her no reason for avoiding the man, however, and the argument is at a deadlock when Fernandez breaks in on them, Allison's letter still in his hand.

Under the strain of this bad news, Fernandez has broken his promise. He is inflamed with drink and commences to abuse Allison. Tempers run high, and in a few minutes the two men are fighting madly. Eventually Fernandez, still weak from his illness, is forced to give in. He lurches out of the bungalow, swearing to get his own back somehow.

Jean, horrified and revolted by this scene, declares she will have nothing further to do with either of them.

Shortly after this, Allison is called away to a remote

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part of his Division. He leaves on foot, accompanied only by his cook and four carriers.

Fernandez hears of this and, realizing that Allison must return through the Sura country, he sets off for Dawiya's compound. His love for Jean, his promises of good behaviour, are forgotten. He is animated by one desire—to revenge himself on Allison.

Dawiya has now become so enamoured of the fire water that he is easily persuaded that it would be a splendid scheme to arrange an ambush and entrap the District Officer. Poisoned arrows fired by unseen marksmen will soon account for him. Yilkuba, the peace-loving witch doctor, uses every endeavour to dissuade him. He even takes him up to a sacred place in the rocks on top of a mountain, and there reads the portents from a spell of fire and water. But Dawiya is deaf to his warnings. He points up the valley. Far away in the distance between the hills can be seen a little file of people. It is Allison and his party.

Allison, unaware of the trouble brewing, decides to camp that night in the shelter of the valley.

Dawiya, full of fire water and enthusiasm, gathers his men together and the night is passed in feasting and war dancing round the camp fire.

Towards daybreak Yilkuba makes one last appeal. It is ignored, and he determines to take action for himself. Calling to a messenger, he bids him take a horse and ride at top speed to the chief of the Angas tribe.

At dawn Allison, shaving outside his tent, is astonished to see an arrow flash past and bury itself in







MUSA KATAGUM



BUGGERLUGS. " THEY ALL BE THE SAME. THEY HUMBUG  
A PERSON TOO MUCH "

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the canvas. Quickly he seizes his revolver and the Union Jack which every District Officer plants in his camp, however small, and runs to cover, followed by his cook, while his bearers scatter in all directions. Arrows and spears are coming thick and fast, and he is almost surrounded when he gains the shelter of a group of rocks.

A grim fight ensues. The pagans are ugly and determined. Allison fires into them again and again. A deep gash from a spear appears on his arm. Ammunition is running short, and the position looks pretty desperate when the sound of thundering hoofs is heard, and down the valley sweeps a splendid company of loyal Angas, armed to the teeth.

From a vantage point on the hill-side Dawiya sees that the tide is turning against him. A coward at heart, he decides to flee. But first he goes to his compound to warn the old people, women and children, and drive out his precious live stock, for he knows only too well what line the white man will take.

There is a wild scramble to evacuate. Frantic ponies, goats, sheep, and chickens plunge about among the rocks, driven by owners almost equally demented. Defeated tribesmen begin to pour through the village, adding to the confusion.

Meanwhile Allison, his wounds roughly dressed, follows the trail of his retreating enemies up to the compound. By the time he arrives there is no one left there but old Yilkuba bemoaning the waywardness of the departed Dawiya. Allison orders the village to be fired, and the scene fades out on Yilkuba, a tragic

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figure, poised on a rock above the smoke and flame.

What became of Fernandez I am unable to say, but presumably Jean was eventually convinced of his villainy, for the film fades out on the customary reconciliation between the romantically bandaged hero and the tenderly ministering nurse.

## Chapter Seven

FROM this bare outline of the story there grew the full scenario.

The first step was to divide the story into sequences identified by a letter—*i.e.* the opening sequence at the resthouse was Sequence A, and so on through the alphabet. Each sequence was then plotted into scenes, and these in turn elaborated into long, medium, and close shots, each of which received a number and a footage estimate.

During actual production, the sequence letter and shot number are chalked on a board already bearing the name of the director, the film, and the cameraman. There is also a space for the "take" number. Before each shot is taken, this board is held in front of the camera and photographed. In these days of talkies, a property man or camera assistant also comes before the camera with two pieces of wood which he claps together. The sound produced is recorded by the sound camera, and indicates the beginning of a take. These curious formalities enable the film editor to sort out the film more readily when the "cutting" stage is reached.

Film-making receives so much publicity nowadays that most people who are interested in the art are aware that a film is not made in the order in which it appears on the screen. A list of sets and locations is

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prepared; against each is placed the numbers of the sequences and scenes taking place therein, in order that all the action taking place in any one set or location may be covered before passing on to the next. A schedule is then laid out so that sets may be built, used and struck, or demolished, and other sets built in their place, and locations worked in with the least possible waste of time and money. These arrangements are naturally influenced also by the contracts of high-salaried artistes and the hiring of expensive furniture and fittings.

For each set and location the number of days' work is estimated; then for each day a chart is drawn up showing the artistes required, their costume, the props, the scenes to be taken, the time (day or night). At the end of the day, during production, the floor secretary, or script girl as she is now called, makes a report of the day's work showing the number of takes of each scene, the footage consumed, the artistes, extras, and staff concerned, and many other details required by the executive, so that they may know how they stand from day to day. Delays are unavoidable, but they must not be allowed to pass unremarked, for time is money, and big money, in the film business. But when you are several thousand miles from your studio, and there are only three of you to do everything, you cannot afford to be too fussy over details. A fortnightly report to catch the mail was the most I could manage.

The task of analysis in this case was simple. It was obvious that the ambush and battle scenes at the end of the film must be taken first. The only artiste re-

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quired would be Haddon Mason, who would be available for a month before the arrival of Reggie Fox and Hilda Cowley, the artiste eventually chosen to play the part of the nurse. Furthermore, amateur crowd artistes are apt to become quickly bored, and we had no reason to suppose that the pagans would be an exception. Therefore they must be used in large numbers while our activities were still a novelty. On this basis, we went ahead with our plans.

Most of our work at Barracki-n-Lahadi was done at a table in the little lounge, or anteroom, at the top of the front steps. Here, with the double doors flung open, it was comparatively cool for the greater part of the day. Sometimes, while Barkie paced up and down thinking out a scene, I would lean on the typewriter and watch a string of camels passing along the road on the horizon, like a living frieze, Biblical in its simplicity, or a solitary Hausa, dirty robes dragging in the dust, head and shoulders buried in an enormous grass hat with pointed crown, a long staff in his hand, and a donkey with laden panniers trotting before him. Often for hours at a time the sun beat down on a deserted landscape, sending up waves of shimmering heat.

I drank it all in—the glorious warmth, the spacious grandeur of the rolling plains. I thought of the outlook from the windows at home—the neat houses across the road, only a few yards distant, the conventional privet hedges and laburnum trees, the tradesmen's vans rattling up and down—all the small paraphernalia of suburban life. Mrs. A. has a new lamp-

## *Behind the Camera*

Plateau. Now he was going home for good. They all professed to envy him, but he did not look very happy, this dried-up little man in his roughly ironed shirt and old tweed suit.

In no time at all the air was thick with smoke and reminiscences. Greetings and gossip rose to a perfect babel of talk. The small boy threaded his way deftly with successive dishes of small chop. Soda sparklegs hissed and spluttered—glasses clinked. Laughter broke and spread.

The one woman guest was a very charming Greek, the wife of an English prospector. Feeling rather shy, I kept as close to her as I could. But she was deservedly popular, and I was constantly involved in introductions.

MRS. X. Oh, Miss Webb, this is Mr. Smith.

MR. S. AND SELF (*fumbling glasses*). How d'you do.

MR. S. (*enthusiastically*). I hear you're going to make a film out here.

SELF (*modestly*). Yes—we're going to try to.

MR. S. (*deferentially*). And what part are you playing?

SELF (*loath to relinquish spurious glamour*). Oh, I'm afraid you've been misled. I'm not taking part.

MR. S. (*visibly dashed*). But I heard——

SELF (*truthfully*). No. I'm Mr. Barkas's secretary. I'd rather face a firing squad than a camera any day.

MR. S. (*mirthlessly*). Ha, ha!

SELF (*relenting*). Our leading lady, Miss Cowley, is joining us in about six weeks.

MR. S. (*rallying*). Really? That's splendid. Tell

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me, what's the film about? (*with faintly menacing jocularity*). Another *White Cargo*?

SELF (*tersely*). No. Hero and heroine pure as the driven snow. Villain only slightly soiled and marked down.

MR. S. (*valiantly*). Ha, ha, ha! Here comes Clarke with another admirer for you.

(MR. S. *escapes thankfully and informs his cronies that I am pretty grim, I fear.*)

MR. CLARKE. Miss Webb, may I introduce Mr. Jones?

SELF AND MR. J. (*fumbling glasses*). How d'you do?

MR. J. I hear you're going to make a film out here.

SELF (*patiently*). Yes—we're going to try to.

MR. J. (*deferentially*). And what part are you playing?

SELF (*desperately*). I'm afraid you've been misinformed——

(Repeat *ad lib.*)

Dinner, commencing decorously, on account of the feminine element, rapidly became uproarious. Toast after toast was proposed and drunk. In the shadows beyond the circle of lamplight the white-uniformed boys dashed back and forth from the service door, their bare feet making no sound. Now and again a couple would get together in brisk argument until a sharp word from the host sent them about their business.

By the time the liqueur stage was reached things



## *Behind the Camera*

had become very merry indeed. So much so, that my Greek friend and I retired to my bedroom.

"If I were you, my dear," she advised me, "I should turn in pretty soon. It's all very well for me—I'm used to them——"

Shortly after this I did go to bed—but not to sleep.

The one-storied houses of the Plateau are divided into rooms by good stout walls, but there are no ceilings. The air is thus kept circulating freely between the tops of the walls and the rafters. So is the conversation.

The dining-room being on the other side of the central corridor, I could not hear the stories which provoked such gales of laughter. But when the party moved to the lounge and burst into song . . . of course, I *could* have stuffed my fingers in my ears, but I'm afraid I didn't. I just lay there with wide-open eyes and distended ears and followed the astonishing adventures (unexpurgated) of Barnacle Bill the Sailor, and the startlingly coy admonitions of the Maid of Amsterdam. Fortunately, perhaps, the words became more and more blurred as the night wore on, and I was finally lulled to sleep by a low, confused murmur. Undoubtedly the party was a great success.

In recognition of the hospitality of the Keffi Company, represented by Mr. Clarke, it had been arranged that a short film should be made of the process by which tin is discovered, worked, and prepared for shipment. Accordingly, while Barkie and I were

## *Behind the Camera*

busy on the script, Roddie departed with Mr. Clarke each morning and was seen no more until sundown. Once or twice I accompanied him to take notes and collect the necessary facts for titling and editing the film when finished.

The operation of excavating tin from a well-found mine provides on a gargantuan scale a spectacle very similar to that which meets the eye when a brick or boulder is lifted in the garden to disclose a flourishing colony of ants in the resulting cavity.

From top to bottom, terrace by terrace, the huge crater in the red earth at Keffi seemed to be alive with naked black figures bending over sluice boxes, wielding pick and shovel, filing up and down with full and empty headpans, while around the top paced the Hausa headmen, shouting instructions, berating the lazy ones, cursing the fools.

The unskilled native labourers employed on the Plateau come from all parts of Northern Nigeria, and are usually Hausa-speaking. They have adapted themselves to the use of a pick and shovel and, judiciously disciplined, prove very useful workers. The more intelligent among them prefer to have a roving commission and to work "on tribute"—that is to say, they are paid by results—so many pence per pound of tin. Other labour is paid a weekly wage. The pagans are also gradually finding it profitable to work on the mines, especially in the construction of dams and other earthworks. Entire families toil together, the men digging and shovelling and the women and children carrying the broken earth in headpans.

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Methods of working the tin deposits vary considerably and range from the primitive hand labour of the calabasher to the use of the most up-to-date steam shovels and electrically driven gravel pumps. Water, properly controlled, is a prominent factor, and hundreds of dams have been built on the various rivers to impound the rainfall of the wet season, while many miles of water channels have been dug to lead this storage supply to the workings where it is utilized in sluicing away the valueless overburden of earth and clay which usually covers the tin-bearing gravel.

Much of our time was wasted at Keffi owing to the obstinacy of a new steam shovel which had just been installed. The Company were keenly desirous of having this shovel photographed in action, but though all the available engineers pored over it for days at a time in the blistering heat, it was impossible to obtain more than a few short spasms of motion, and so I returned to my typewriter and left Roddie to it.

Before we had been at Barracki-n-Lahadi many days it became quite clear that we should be seriously crippled without some sort of vehicle of our own. There were two cars in the camp—the Dodge and a Ford. Both of these were nearly always in use, and although lifts were given freely they were seldom available at a suitable time or in the right direction. To Roddie also fell the task of obtaining a car for the outfit.

I say "task" advisedly, because it was no easy

## *Behind the Camera*

matter. In England you have barely formulated in your mind the idea that you would like a car, before you are beset on all sides by friends and dealers eager to anticipate your wishes. Outside every garage stand rows of second-hand cars looking variously defiant, dejected, neglected, pathetic, or merely comic by comparison with the proud glitter of their brand-new sisters on the other side of the plate-glass windows. Well-groomed and courteous salesmen are only too pleased to supply information and encouragement. The difficulty is to *escape* buying a car.

Up-country in Nigeria there exists a very different state of affairs. It is wellnigh impossible to buy a car at short notice. Nearly everybody has one, of course; but having gone to great trouble and expense in bringing it out from England, they are not easily persuaded to part with it unless they are just going on leave with the intention of buying a new one and consigning the present relic to the scrap-heap.

In the course of his work on the Keffi film Roddie came in contact with most of the mining fraternity, and at length, after some weeks of patient enquiry, announced that he had found the very thing, and the fellow wanted only £90 for it, complete with chauffeur.

"The very thing" proved to be a battered old museum-piece whose tattered hood flapped jauntily in the breeze and whose upholstery defied description. The spokes of her wooden wheels were interlaced with rope, but her *engine*, Roddie assured us, was in perfect condition; and he walked round and patted her affectionately. She seemed to be an Overland.

## *Behind the Camera*

During the next few days a formidable combination of ignorance and low cunning on the part of a series of native chauffeurs deprived us of the few spare parts and tools with which she was equipped, including the starting handle, thus bringing to light the disquieting fact that there was no self-starter, and placing beyond all doubt the antiquity of Roddie's find.

So the fifth chauffeur was dismissed, and a new handle contrived out of a length of lead piping. This, in due course, met a similar fate, but Roddie remained undaunted. The Overland was his darling, the apple of his eye, and the most damnable nuisance he had ever encountered. On her he lavished every spare moment of his time, and for her benefit he developed a latent talent for scrounging which made him a by-word on the Plateau.

Poor Roddie! As the time drew near for us to move out to Panyam, his responsibilities were increased by the addition of a Ford lorry hired from a store in Jos at the iniquitous fee of £10 per week. This vehicle was eventually required to convey props, camera gear, and native assistants to and from location at Panyam. In the meantime, in charge of a native chauffeur and his assistant it made frequent journeys to Jos to fetch stores, mail, petrol, etc. These journeys seemed to occupy a prodigious amount of time, and the explanations forthcoming were highly unsatisfactory when they could be understood at all. Another mystery which defeated us for some time was the apparently urgent necessity for an assistant to every chauffeur. Neither the one nor the other ever had a vestige of

## *Behind the Camera*

mechanical knowledge, so that two heads were obviously not better than one—rather worse, in fact. However, we bowed to the custom of the country and meekly took on an assistant with each successive chauffeur until one day, returning from Jos in the Overland, we stumbled on a possible explanation of both these problems.

Ambling along just ahead of us was a familiar-looking lorry literally crammed with natives. They overflowed the back, clung to the running board and swarmed on the bonnet, their robes flapping wildly in the breeze. Our own driver showed a strong disposition to hurry past this interesting spectacle, but we restrained him and hung behind to make quite sure. Yes, that was undoubtedly Sam the chauffeur in his old topee and football jersey. Every now and then the lorry stopped to put down or pick up passengers. On each occasion a transaction took place between the departing passenger and the assistant. So this was the idea, then. Driver and conductor of a flourishing bus service.

Needless to say, this combination was speedily made away with and a fresh crew engaged.

## *Chapter Eight*

PREPARATIONS for the move out to Panyam were very nearly complete when Haddon Mason duly appeared. He was a complete stranger to me, and I had wondered how we should all get on together, whether he would knuckle down to the bush life we were proposing to lead, or whether he would prove difficult.

He arrived late at night with Roddie, who had been down to Zaria to meet him, so that the first time I saw him was after breakfast next morning. Tall, slim and fair, he looked very well in his khaki shorts and bush shirt. I liked his humorous blue eyes and attractive twisted smile. What none of us liked, however, was the cable he brought with him from our Managing Director. It read as follows:

“Story not strong enough stop await new version with Fox.”

These few words filled us with the most profound consternation. Here we were with plans carefully laid, provisions and accommodation secured, our whole existence dependent on the kindness and good will of the Government and mining officials on the Plateau, and we were asked to sit down and wait for a month until Reggie Fox arrived with another story

## *Behind the Camera*

when, presumably, we must start planning all over again.

"This is what comes of being over-conscientious," I remarked, with the female instinct for emphasizing the unpleasantly obvious. "If we'd just enjoyed ourselves on the boat coming out, we shouldn't be in this fix now."

Barkie gazed at me absently and made no reply. I could see he was extremely worried. Of course we had abandoned long ago the story concocted on the boat and posted home from Lagos. Based on ideas of the country gathered largely from books, we soon found that it included incidents far beyond our scope.

After several hours' palaver and a good deal of hearty cursing, we finally dashed in to Jos and cabled back that we must either stick to the story we had just completed, a copy of which was then on its way to England, or else we must return home at once with no film at all. It was rank insubordination, in a way, but there was nothing else to do. All other things apart, if we waited another month before starting work, the rains would be upon us long before we had finished. We had been sent out to write and produce a story on the spot. We must do that, or nothing.

Having despatched this ultimatum, we proceeded very soberly to move ourselves out to Panyam. It took several days and involved periods of the most excruciating anxiety in connection with the lorry, which was called upon to make numerous journeys back and forth.





VILLAGE SCENES FROM THE FILM

*To face p. 100*



## *Behind the Camera*

First of all, Barkie and Haddon, with Owdu, were established at the resthouse. Roddie drove them out in the Overland, for by now he had reached the conclusion that it was better to risk a shaky hand on the camera, through driving over rough roads, than to almost certainly achieve a nervous breakdown trying to cope with two chauffeurs. Nobody questioned his ability to drive, and it was not until he returned from his first journey to Panyam, looking rather pale, that he admitted to me that this was the first time he had driven a car. "But I had a motor bike once," he added modestly.

When at last all the gear had been transported, Roddie and I, with Tom and a new addition called Alfred, who was intended to smooth the path of Haddon Mason, set out to join the other two. It was a journey that will remain long in my memory.

Following us as we left the camp was the lorry piled up to a semblance of St. Paul's, with Kadiri perilously clinging to the side. The driver was one Balaclava, the last of a long line of incompetents, and so christened by us on account of the ancient khaki woollen helmet of that variety from which his perspiring features perpetually peered.

We made our first mistake at a fork in the road only two miles from Barracki-n-Lahadi. Here Roddie took the right-hand curve. Looking over my shoulder, I noticed that the lorry had turned to the left. As Roddie had only made the journey once, and Balaclava had made it more times than we cared to think about, we decided that he must know best. This piece of

## *Behind the Camera*

faulty psychology involved us in an extra twenty miles, every yard of which was packed with incident. First one thing and then another fell off the swaying lorry ahead of us. A second time we missed a turning, and Roddie began to mutter under his breath.

Pretty soon it became apparent that there was something very, very unusual about the working of the Overland's gears and brakes. Half-way up a steep hill we began to roll backwards rapidly. A period of sickening suspense ensued, during which time I had awful visions of turning a complete somersault. I am not a nervous person, in fact I have the reputation of being unusually phlegmatic, but I felt myself going as white as a sheet. Roddie trod frantically on everything in sight, but it was no use. The only thing to do was to turn into the ditch, on the other side of which was a high bank. With a terrifying lurch we stopped, broadside on, in a cloud of dust and steam, with our back axle in the ditch.

There are no A.A. signs or wayside telephones in Nigeria, but fortunately the Londoner has nothing on the pagan when it comes to nosing out an accident. Within a few moments we were almost overpowered by the attentions of excited men, women, and children in an enviable state of nudity who appeared miraculously from an apparently deserted landscape, deditched us, and propelled us to the top of the hill with great efficiency and screams of joy.

Once more we set out, and now I had to be prepared to jump out at a moment's notice so that the floorboards could be removed and the gears disengaged.

## *Behind the Camera*

The heat was intense and the dust suffocating. Roddie began to cast anxious eyes towards our wooden wheels, and it was with the greatest relief that we sighted the village market of Mongu.

As soon as we stopped, a large crowd of women and children came and stood in a row, staring curiously. They were Fulani, light-skinned and rather attractive. Their black frizzy hair was worn in innumerable tight plaits at each side of the head and curved outwards just above their shoulders, giving them an Egyptian appearance. Unlike the pagan women, they all wore coloured cotton robes wound tightly round their bodies just beneath the armpits.

The market was a square enclosed by grass shelters, and the wares were set out on little low tables in the centre. Here Balaclava procured some much-needed rope to secure his loads, and negotiated for several pails of water to be thrown at the wheels of the Overland. He then enlisted all the active members of the population, and with loud cries of "Push 'em!" we staggered off once more.

And now we come to the desperate part of the journey. Both Roddie and I knew that a few miles farther on the road made a sudden very steep descent to a narrow plank bridge beyond which it immediately ascended at an equally alarming angle. It was no use pretending that Roddie was an expert driver, because he wasn't, and he had already been a little bit shaken by our previous backsliding. We rode along in silence until he called a halt on the brink of this precipice. We both got out and had a look. Half-way down, the

## *Behind the Camera*

road took a steeper turn, so that from where we stood we could not see the bridge at all.

"I'm not going to attempt it with you and the boys on board," announced Roddie.

"Don't be silly, Roddie, I don't mind taking a chance," I replied.

"No!" said Roddie firmly.

He then got into the car, lit a cigarette, waved to me gaily, and slid slowly down out of sight. With my heart in my mouth I waited for him to appear on the opposite slope. He did—spinning swiftly and triumphantly up in second gear. Gosh, it was hot walking up after him, but I got into the car thankfully and we started on the last few miles of our journey in the best of spirits.

Barkie and Haddon were out in the road to meet us. It seemed that they had been aware of our approach for some time before we came in sight. With them was Major Edgar, the political officer who was to be our father and mother for the next few months.

The major was a Scotsman, aged, I suppose, between fifty and sixty. His grey hair was very nearly as closely shaven as his chin, and his widely set grey eyes reminded me of portraits I had seen of the late Lord Kitchener. He wore a butcher-blue cotton shirt open to the waist, khaki shorts, woollen stockings, and boots. Like Mr. Clarke, he appeared to have become sun-proof. A single felt hat sufficed to protect his head, and he disdained a spine pad. He smoked a pipe and always carried a short cane.

## *Behind the Camera*

"Well, and how do you like Nigeria?" was his greeting to me.

"Fine," said I.

"Good," said he. And thereupon commenced to inform me just how much he liked it.

During the twenty-five years of his political service the Major had been home to Scotland only about once in ten years. When it is considered that the average Anglo-Nigerian goes home both from choice and for reasons of health at least every two years, it will be realized that the Major was a man-and-a-half constitutionally, and an almost fanatical lover of a country which is cruel and treacherous in its demands. He was an authority on the Hausa language, and spent all his leave travelling in remote parts of the Protectorate collecting material for his books, of which already twelve stood to his credit.

In these circumstances it frequently happened that months and months passed by without his ever coming in contact with a white person. I think, at first at any rate, we must have appeared to him as a gift from heaven. There was nothing he was not prepared to do, nothing he could not tell us. He literally drowned us in facts and legends concerning the tribes of the Bauchi Plateau. His enthusiasm for our projected film was absolutely boundless.

Almost inevitably, as we sat over lunch, the subject of ju-jus came up. It is impossible to remain long in Nigeria without encountering the ju-ju complex. Every native wears a charm against his own particular *bête noire*. Maybe it is snake-bite he fears, or the

## *Behind the Camera*

marauding exploits of the leopard on his precious live stock. Many seek to ward off fire, or famine. Others have reason to respect the marksmanship of their enemies with poisoned arrows. Whatever the trouble may be, implicit faith is placed in the powers of the ju-ju as a means of protection.

Usually these charms take the form of little leather-covered packages hung round the neck by a leather thong. Sometimes the horn of a beast is skilfully covered with leather and suspended from the waist. I have a slender, gracefully curved oryx horn, the base of which is encased in leather and contains some substance which rattles like dried peas when the horn is shaken. This was purchased from a reluctant pagan who assured us that it was a certain charm against snake-bite.

When the Major, dilating on the subject, suddenly asked if we would like to have some ju-jus ourselves, we were all greatly intrigued.

"Fine!" said the Major. "Fine! Come with me." And we followed his brisk, vigorous figure across to the round house where he was now installed.

"Hey, Biggerlugs!" he shouted, as we ducked our heads and blinked in the darkness.

A small, gnome-like figure in a white tunic, and a white cotton cap shaped like a Dutch girl's bonnet, emerged from the inner room.

"This is my small boy," explained the Major, playfully tweaking the child's ear. "Go and fetch the mallaam," he ordered the boy.

The mallaam, or scribe, was a gentle, earnest-looking



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creature in a dark robe. He was a Hausa scholar, and travelled everywhere with the Major, assisting him in the preparation of his books. He stood meekly, yet with dignity, awaiting his master's commands.

"Now," said the Major, turning to us. "What is the thing you most desire—fortune, happiness, good health, good luck? Anything you like—just name it."

"Good health," said I, without any hesitation.

"Happiness," said Barkie, while Roddie, already happily married and the father of two small sons, favoured good luck.

The Major communicated our wishes in Hausa, and the scribe went away.

Presently he returned with three sheets of paper. At the top of each was written in Arabic a few lines from the Koran. Below this was a circular maze-like design with a diamond-shaped space in the centre. In this space, on the sheet presented to us, we had each to write our wish. The mallaam then sprinkled the wet ink with sand and folded the paper in a peculiar manner until it was little bigger than a postage stamp. This done, he vanished once more, and in a little while reappeared with three square leather-covered packages containing the three folded papers. These he gave to his master with instructions as to how they must be worn.

The Major handed me mine.

"Will you accept this with my love," he said, with a benevolent twinkle. "Wear it in a right-hand pocket or on your head, and you will always enjoy good health."

## *Behind the Camera*

Barkie and Roddie received theirs with similar instructions.

I'm afraid our remarks, as we strolled back to our own quarters, were of a rather frivolous nature, but we disposed of our ju-jus as directed, and forgot all about them in the excitement of organizing our camp.

Being the only female in the outfit, the housekeeping responsibilities naturally fell to me, inexperienced though I was in these matters.

All along the back corridor of the resthouse, balanced precariously on stone boulders to protect them from the onslaughts of white ants, were ranged our chop boxes—about fifty in all. These were formally handed over to me, together with a large bunch of very small keys. Each box was padlocked and the types of locks were varied so that if a key was mislaid the finder would not have access to the entire food supply. The native has no use whatever for the white man's food, as food, but he has a monkey-like acquisitiveness which compels him to steal anything he can lay his hands on. With the keys went a long list of the contents of the boxes, each of which bore a number.

I surveyed my larder with some dismay, Owdu standing watchfully beside me. Barkie had appointed him chief steward and intermediary between myself and Jos the cook. This, at least, was something to be thankful for. Jos was an extremely fierce-looking individual, and spoke very little English.

Proceeding on a tour of inspection, I passed through the archway from "Chop Box Alley" into the square

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central space, or dining-room. On either side of the doorway, on earthen projections shaped like old-fashioned coppers, stood the water filter and the gramophone. Seven dining-chairs made from packing-cases were placed round the table. Our beds had been erected as originally planned, and our deck-chairs with foot-rests were extended invitingly on the verandah.

While I was mooning round taking all this in, I became conscious of a rhythmical sound of clanking chains.

"What's that, Owdu?" I enquired.

"Water, Ma," he replied, pointing to the road leading to the village.

It did not sound much like water to me. I crossed the verandah and looked out.

It was late afternoon. In soft greys and purples the hills stood out with a depth and richness never accorded them by the midday sun. A hundred yards away the pointed grass roofs of the village of Panyam could be seen above the rough palisade that enclosed it. The trees, marking the course of the stream beyond, cast welcome shadows on the parched earth. Thin, homely columns of blue smoke rose here and there. All was peace and harmony.

But advancing steadily up the road towards the compound was a string of natives balancing kerosene cans on their heads. Clank-clank. Clank-clank. By wrist and ankle each man was chained to his fellow, his shadow dancing mockingly before him.

I turned to Owdu. His hands were folded in the

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sleeves of his gown and a smugly virtuous expression pervaded his shining black face.

"They be prisoners, Ma," he volunteered. "Bad men. No good."

"And is that our water in those cans?"

"Yes, Ma. Every morning, every evening the prisoners bring water. White man want plenty water for bath."

Well, well. So much for the water.

But man cannot live by water alone in the tropics. To begin with, however carefully it is boiled and filtered, it is dangerous stuff to drink. There is, for instance, the guinea worm. The life-cycle of the guinea worm is, as somebody once remarked of *Pilgrim's Progress*, "interesting but steep."

The worm itself, of which I regret to say only the female is known, lives in water and resembles a horse-hair measuring from 60 to 100 centimetres in length and about 2 millimetres in breadth. When desirous, quite unnecessarily, as you will presently agree, of perpetuating its species, it seizes upon a minute and otherwise inoffensive crustacean called a cyclops, into which it injects its larva.

Should you be unfortunate enough to drink some insufficiently boiled and filtered water containing this innocent intermediary host, it will pursue its dreadful course into your stomach and migrate thence to the subcutaneous tissues of your legs or feet. The heel is a favourite situation. Comfortably established there, it relentlessly matures.

Concurrently you become aware of an increasing

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irritation. A hideous suspicion rears itself in your mind. Your drinks boy leads a dog's life or is dismissed without warning, according to the length of your experience.

In due course an abscess forms and a lusty little worm pokes out its head.

Whatever may be your feelings towards this uninvited guest—and they are pretty sure to be violently antagonistic—you must exercise a stern control, for its life must be preserved at all costs. Gradually, day by day, it must be coaxed forth and wound round a match-stick until every revolting centimetre of its length has been withdrawn, when you will heave a tremendous sigh of relief and remain an ardent anti-prohibitionist to the end of your days.

With these and other similar perils in mind, we had ordered plentiful supplies of light beer and lemon and orange squash. The water, when filtered, was transformed, by a process which I never quite fathomed, into soda water and referred to by the boys as sparkleg. In addition to these soft drinks, the cost of which was debited to our employers, we had also brought along the wherewithal for an evening cocktail or pick-me-up. This expense we shared among ourselves, and Haddon had undertaken to become O.C. Cocktails and Keeper of the Drinks Accounts.

Having taken my domestic bearings on this, my first evening, I decided to adopt a policy of *laissez-faire* so far as dinner was concerned, and wash and change into something cooler. When I say "something cooler," I mean a cotton frock and mosquito boots,

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not, as the movies have led us to expect, the snaky, shining *négligée* and dainty mules in which the movie heroine appears after murmuring this phrase to her already sufficiently inflamed admirer.

With the narrow wooden doors closed behind me, I stood and contemplated the appointments of the dim apartment which was to be my bedroom for the next few months.

To my left, perched on stone boulders, stood three tin cabin trunks against the wall beneath the window. Two of them contained my personal belongings. The third held negative film stock and about £50 of West African coinage in small denominations for the paying of crowd artistes. This being the only place available at present with four walls and a door, it was the obvious home for valuables.

Propped up against the bamboo cross-bars of the little window was a small square mirror. Against the right-hand wall stood my bed with its green mosquito net, and beside it a wooden packing-case to sit on. In the small room beyond, my canvas bath stood ready, and beside it, on another packing-case, a tin washing-basin.

The mud floor was uneven and crumbly, the attacks of white ants had reduced the roof bamboos to hollow shells, and in one or two places it was possible to look clear up through the thatch into the sky.

It was useless to think of unpacking. In the first place, except for a couple of clothes lines stretched across two corners of the room, there was nowhere to hang anything, and in the second place, outside of a tin trunk nothing would be safe from the ants.

## *Behind the Camera*

However, this state of affairs by no means distressed me, for if there is one thing I dislike more than packing, it is unpacking. And so, after bawling, "Bath, Tom, one time!" at the top of my voice, I commenced to search for my washing impedimenta.

In a few moments Tom entered quietly with a lighted hurricane lamp which he stood on the window-ledge, and a large can of dark red liquid which he emptied into the bath. From one of the clothes lines he took down my mosquito boots and stood them by the bed.

"You want anything more, Ma?" he then enquired softly.

"No," I said, as rudely as possible, stifling the impulse to add "Thank you," and he withdrew silently.

I happen to be one of those optimistic individuals who, in the face of perpetual discouragement, endeavour to treat servants like human beings. After all, most of us are servants of one kind or another, and we all appreciate politeness and consideration. In a modified form I had applied this habit to Nigerians until I was overheard asking Tom pleasantly to "fetch my topee, please."

"You mustn't be nice to them," I was told. "They'll only take advantage of you."

So now I roared for my bath or boots with the best of them. This was neither the time nor the place to experiment with various kinds of behaviour, but I never quite shook off the feeling that I was being exceedingly uncouth and ill-bred.

For a company of people labouring under a cloud of dark displeasure and the imminent possibility of

## *Behind the Camera*

being recalled to England in disgrace, I must say we put up a very lively show at dinner that night. The Major at the head of the table, led on by Barkie, was highly entertaining. Haddon, who was emerging as a very agreeable and adaptable person, had quickly found in me an easy butt for teasing.

It seemed that there were two lady missionaries residing on the other side of Panyam village. Haddon, for reasons unknown, had taken it upon himself to call upon them. Though horrified and dismayed beyond words at the possible effect of our filming activities on their disciples, their chief preoccupation, according to Haddon, was the problem of where I was going to sleep.

"In the resthouse, of course," said Haddon blandly.

This was too much. "What, with all those men?"

Haddon assured them that, regrettable though it might appear to them, this was the case, and shortly afterwards he left the good ladies fairly sizzling with disapproval.

Calling again on the following evening not, I fear, with the very highest motives, Haddon was received frigidly and not pressed to step over the threshold. So now he gave vent to his mischievous impulses by inventing for me a past, present, and future of the most outrageous description.

Light-heartedly, the cares and anxieties of active production not yet upon us, we sat and talked, while the gramophone, under the ministrations of Buggerlugs, gave out cheerful music, and the tablecloth became smothered in a variety of strange insects, large and



## *Behind the Camera*

small, attracted by the lamplight. Praying mantises, pale green, with cruel, heart-shaped faces, sat rubbing their forelegs together—hard-backs, round, heavy, and dark brown, came hurtling through the air like marbles, hitting one sharply in the face or buzzing frantically in one's hair. Strangely enough, neither then nor at any other time did I actually see or hear any mosquitoes, though I had been fully prepared to find the air was thick with them, day and night.

## *Chapter Nine*

WHEN one looks back on a location trip, either at home or abroad, there are always certain local personalities that stand out by reason of their intelligent and unquestioning co-operation in an undertaking which must, in its apparently jumbled confusion of scenes and characters, seem like some fantastic nightmare. Such a one was Musa Katagum of Pankshin, Government messenger and interpreter. What we should have done without him I do not know, though it must be conceded that, lacking Major Edgar's guiding hand, his usefulness could never have been so fully exploited. Not that Musa was exploited in the usual sense of the word. Indeed, one has only to read the following letter to realize that he was fully alive to his own interests.

"Panyam, 9.3.1926.

G. Barkas, Esqr., Resthouse, Panyam.

SIR,—I have the honour most respectfully to acknowledge for your kind promised of paying me 10s. every week please. Nothing for me in last week, please. Good morning, Sir.

I have the honour to be, Sir,  
Your obedient servant,

MUSA KATAGUM,  
Government Messenger,  
Pankshin Division."



RODDIE'S CAMERA POSITION ON THE WHITE ROCK

*10 feet p. 116*



## *Behind the Camera*

This, written in a small crabbed hand, was the first of many letters which he delighted to address to Barkie. He spoke excellent English and was familiar with all the different dialects of the surrounding pagan tribes, among whom he seemed to command considerable respect. A Hausa, and a man of unusual attainments, even for that scholarly race, he exhibited by contrast an engagingly childish pride in his shining bicycle, without which he was seldom seen, and his badge as a Government messenger pinned to the bosom of his long white robe with a gigantic safety-pin.

Musa it was who dealt firmly but tactfully with the endless succession of Hausawa, pagans, and Fulani who came in to pay their respects as soon as the news of our arrival had circulated. Each and all of these worthies brought some kind of "dash" or gift, which had to be received with due ceremony. Yams, goats' milk and butter, chickens and paw-paws were showered upon us. At first, leaving the problem of disposal to Owdu, we thought how kind and gracious it all was. But we were soon disillusioned. It appeared that this "dashing" habit postulated a return in cash, and the scale of re-dashing was expected to be liberal—more than market rate, in fact, or else we sustained a serious loss of prestige. It seemed a long-winded and expensive way of buying groceries, but we had to submit to custom. Undeniably, we extracted considerable pleasure from the picturesque appearance of our visitors, and the easy and graceful manner in which they grouped themselves around the foot of the verandah steps, silhouetted against the blazing sunshine and

## *Behind the Camera*

framed, of course, by the purple bougainvillæa trailing up the porch.

One of the first tasks allotted to Musa was the finding of Yiberr, the pagan chief discovered by Barkie on that memorable week-end when he left all his hair in the bush. When first seen, Yiberr was sitting on a rock by the side of a trail surrounded by his headmen. So truculent and formidable did he look that Barkie decided then and there that he would be ideal for the part of Dawiya.

On the morning after my arrival at Panyam, therefore, Yiberr came swaggering into the compound attended by a train of his sons—about twenty all told. On his head he wore one of the little pointed straw caps with a long tongue, which seemed to be indicative of rank in these parts. Round his neck were hung a large number of leather thongs and amulets, and from his shoulders depended a sort of skin cape through which was thrust a large hatchet, the blade crooked over one shoulder. An assortment of metal bracelets rattled on his arms, and he carried two long spears. A hunting-knife protruded from the larger animal skin which was tied round his waist and hung below his knees at the back, and his calves were encased in steel leggings ornamented with a set of murderous-looking prongs for use as spurs. These leggings were stuffed with dried grass to protect his ankles, which would otherwise have been cruelly lacerated.

At the foot of the verandah steps he halted, his bearded chin at a haughty angle. His sons, who wore nothing to speak of, grouped themselves silently and

## *Behind the Camera*

respectfully around him. They made a striking picture of savage freedom and virility.

After the customary ceremonial greetings they all sat down on the ground facing us, and Major Edgar began to explain to Yiberr, in his own language, the reason for his summons. The white man here, said the Major, indicating Barkie, was anxious to see if he could play a great game for us. He wanted to discover if Yiberr could pretend to be very angry.

To our surprise and delight the old rascal immediately grasped the idea. With a clatter of accoutrements he sprang to his feet. Slowly he drew his knife. A murderous expression suffused his eyes as his gaze passed from one to another of his uneasy offspring. Suddenly, his face now distorted with rage, his mind revolving who knows what in the way of past misdemeanours to aid him in the selection of his victim, he pounced. The unlucky youth, kicking and shouting, was dragged out into the compound and there made the object of an attack so life-like that, when released, he took to his heels and fled.

Yiberr, wild-eyed and with heaving chest, strode back to the foot of the steps. He had given a polished little cameo of dramatic acting and, in suitably modified terms, he was informed of the fact. Enchanted with our approval of his efforts, he readily agreed, on a promise of reward, to come and play as many more games as the white man wanted. He was then told that he would be known to us as Dawiya, which means "the trouble maker." This tickled his vanity enormously. Followed by his remaining sons, all looking

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slightly apprehensive, he withdrew, all smiles and rich fruity chuckles at the thought of the discomfited one who had taken to the bush.

We counted ourselves very fortunate to come upon so promising an actor as Dawiya with so little trouble, and as Barkie had already secured the services of the Sarikin Tsafi of Pankshin to play the part of Yilkuba, the witch doctor, the next job to tackle was the enlistment of crowds.

First of all the news was broadcast to the pagans far and near that we wanted them to take part in a great war game. Then a day and time were appointed and they were summoned to the resthouse to hear all about it.

Led by their chiefs and headmen, they came in hundreds, and "got up to kill" is an expression which may be truthfully used to describe their appearance. Every man and boy had a weapon of some sort. Chests, backs, and thighs were daubed with freshly applied red mud, while a quaint variety of straw hats gave an unintentionally coquettish air to what was otherwise a most impressive display.

There were far too many of them for accommodation in our compound, so they were directed to the open space behind the round resthouse and here, squatted on the ground, they listened attentively while the Major, with the rest of us grouped round him, embarked on the long and intricate task of explaining what was required of them. Standing by were Musa, several pagan interpreters, and Adamu Gatari, a member of the Nigerian Police who was now attached to the party.



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Although all these people lived within a radius of twenty miles, many different tribes and languages were represented. The majority, however, were either Angas or Sura pagans.

Opening with a few apt remarks which set them chuckling and put them in a good humour, the Major then got down to the serious business of the day. To begin with, the word "photograph" conveyed nothing to them. A lengthy series of synonyms had to be employed before, with much clicking of tongues and shaking of heads, this point became reasonably clear.

A large slab of flattery then supervened. Through the medium of these photographs, said the Major, we should carry their images to thousands of people beyond the seas, so that the white men could learn of the greatness of the pagan races.

This was received with approving grunts and an almost visible swelling of pride in the assembly.

For this purpose, they were told, we should want them to turn out in their full hunting kit, just as they were at that moment, to do battle for the glories of their tribes as in the days of yore.

The battles, however, would be mock battles. Men would fall dead and would lie still until they were told they might rise. They would have to throw spears as near as possible to a district officer, who would defend himself with his gun. This gun would fire with plenty of noise, but nobody would be hurt.

Noise and nothing beside!

Here was food for thought indeed. A blank and

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uncomprehending silence descended upon the gathering. Finally, one by one, the older men began to ask questions. It was evident they suspected some deeply laid plot to accomplish their ruin.

This, after all, was not surprising. For ten years they had been dissuaded from violence of any kind. Bloodshed had been heavily punished and the arts of peace rewarded. And here was a political officer, sent by the Big Judge, the Governor, actually ordering them to turn out and fight battles—to throw spears at one another—more than that, actually to throw spears at a district officer.

No, they said, volubly and definitely, it was not good enough. If they obeyed, undoubtedly the police would come along, as they had done in the past, to drag them out of their mountain villages and take them to prison.

A veritable babel of discussion arose, heads were shaken obstinately, but the Major and his interpreters pegged away, and were presently able to convince the more intelligent of the headmen that it was really a game, and that no serious consequences would follow.

At length, grudgingly, they agreed to turn out in their hunting kit and fight a make-believe battle.

But what was all this about throwing spears at a white man? It was altogether too good to be true. Throw spears at a white man and get off scot-free?

The Major, having temporarily discarded his political conscience on our behalf, stoutly repeated that they were really and truly invited to throw spears, and

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that nothing whatever would happen to them. In fact, added the Major, who was nothing if not thorough, they would actually be paid for it.

This last statement took a good deal of swallowing. Incredulous guffaws rose here and there. Nevertheless, the idea was obviously appealing to them. The thought of the police, however, still caused them to hesitate. Not once, but many times in the past, misdeeds which they had thought would pass unnoticed, protected as they were by their mountain strongholds and their skill in arms, had met swift and terrible punishment at the hands and rifles of the Nigerian Police. A mere handful of police could exact a heavy penalty, and their fire-weapons had struck a very real terror into the hearts of the natives.

There was a long silence, and then one old chief spoke up.

"We believe all that the white man says. He is our father and our mother and we are his children," he announced solemnly. "But we would feel happier and more comfortable if he would *prove* to us that his gun holds nothing but noise."

This seemed a reasonable request, and simple enough to gratify. The Major and Barkie consulted together, and in a few moments Haddon went across to the resthouse to fetch his revolver and some blank ammunition.

In the meantime a space had been cleared. Forth stepped Barkie and the Major. Over they bent like a couple of schoolboys preparing for a swishing. Then Haddon, from a distance of about six yards, took aim

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and fired at the posteriors thus obligingly proffered. It was a most ridiculous sight.

At the first shot the audience, which had already taken the precaution of rising to its feet, ducked and prepared to fly. Obviously it had had first-hand experience of the effects of bullets. One or two more intrepid spirits, however, turned to look. They stopped. A few others followed their example. Apparently no harm had come to these two crazy white men.

Taking advantage of this moment of uncertainty, Haddon fired again. Barkie and the Major leapt in the air and danced around in pretended enjoyment. Once more they bent over, and again Haddon fired. Fear and astonishment gave place to delight on the faces of the pagans. They closed in again.

By a lucky chance the two men had hit upon just the kind of antics calculated to appeal to their childish sense of humour. They rolled about in an ecstasy of enjoyment, digging each other in the ribs, and shaking with mirth.

On this note of high good humour the Major deemed it prudent to dismiss the meeting. A good deal had been accomplished and it would not do to try them too far at first.

So the pagans went away and presumably thought things over in the cold light of reason, for it became necessary to hold several more palavers, spread over a number of days, before the general scheme was grasped by all and the honesty of our intentions accepted.

And even then the most alarming rumours were circulated. Musa was continually waylaid by distressed

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savages begging him to persuade us to go away and not bring this awful trouble upon them. Patiently it was explained to them again and again that nobody would be punished, nobody would be hurt.

At last they were all satisfied, and agreed to turn out four hundred strong, mounted and on foot, and do anything we wanted. Giving them no opportunity to cool off, Barkie fixed the first call for the next day at two hours after sunrise in the Valley of the White Rock.

## *Chapter Ten*

IT was barely light when Tom roused me with a cup of tea next morning. By half-past seven, packed into the Overland, we were careering down the road towards Vodni followed by the Ford lorry containing the camera gear and Roddie's troupe of performing carriers. Musa on his bicycle, his robes ballooning behind him, brought up the rear.

About two miles from the resthouse the vehicles were parked under some trees, and we made our way on foot to the rendezvous.

Alongside the tree-shaded course of a dried-up stream a narrow dusty path wound its way up the centre of a valley about half a mile wide. On either hand rose a range of cruel-looking rocky hills. Huge boulders were poised as though about to crash down at our feet. Clumps of cactus and other sinister-looking bushes seemed to spring from the rocks themselves. Higher and higher the hills became until, in the distance, they converged in one tremendous mass of gigantic rocks, as though shattered by a terrific impact.

It was a typical piece of plateau scenery, affording ample opportunities for interesting shots without a great deal of moving about. In addition, some little way up the valley there jutted out on the right a grand, rugged promontory commanding a magnificent view

## *Behind the Camera*

in all directions. Crowning this promontory was a large flat rock, bleached and smoothed by who knows how many decades of tropical sun and rain. To this the eye was drawn as soon as one entered the valley—a landmark among the greys and drabs of the surrounding hills—and so our location was christened the Valley of the White Rock.

At the foot of the promontory we halted. It was about eight o'clock. The sun was well up. But not so the pagans. There was not a soul in sight. An uncompromising silence enfolded the valley and a certain blankness descended on the party.

"Don't you worry," said the Major comfortably, feeling in his pockets for pipe and tobacco. "They'll be along presently. They haven't any alarum clocks, you know," he added mildly.

So Roddie went off in search of camera positions, and Barkie took Musa and climbed up among the rocks to choose a site for the building of Dawiya's compound. The carriers, dumping their loads beneath some trees, squatted down and fell to chewing their eternal betel-nut and squirting between their teeth at intervals sharp jets of dark red juice.

The rest of us sat on a slab of rock and waited—the Major with equanimity; Haddon and myself with growing impatience.

The sun rose steadily in the sky. Shut in by the hills, the valley became a veritable oven. We were glad indeed of smoked glasses to shield us from the glare.

Presently Barkie and Roddie returned.

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Still no pagans.

Musa shrugged his shoulders and intimated that, for his part, it was no more than he had expected. What would you? They were only wild, uncultivated "peegans." They had no sense of time. However, he would send forth messengers. He sped off on his bicycle, very busy.

Well, at any rate, the camera could be set up.

"We'll kick off with a long shot from the White Rock," decided Barkie.

I gathered up my script and number board, and handed Barkie his megaphone. The carriers, who had chewed themselves into a coma, were roused. Hoisting their heavy loads on heads and shoulders as though they weighed nothing at all, they swarmed up the hill-side, deft and agile as monkeys, followed more slowly by Roddie and me.

It was a hot and exhausting climb, but the view up and down the valley and over the opposite crags to the plains beyond was well worth it.

From below Barkie shouted up, "Any signs of them?" and his voice echoed hollowly from side to side.

I told him "No," and watched the Major give him a fatherly pat on the shoulder. He was anxious. Who wouldn't have been? All the writing, planning, and organizing of the last two months had been leading up to this day. If the pagans failed to turn up—well, it didn't bear thinking about.

I turned to see if I could help Roddie.

It is customary for a cameraman to have at least one



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assistant. Having none, it was Roddie's intention to train his carriers to perform the more elementary of the duties usually assigned to an assistant.

The loads had been deposited by the White Rock, and the carriers, happily unaware of the fate hanging over them, had resumed their chewing, their desultory comments, and their gentle slumbers. Hands on hips, Roddie regarded them distastefully.

"What are their names, Roddie?" I asked idly.

"No idea," he replied. "George is good enough for me. Hey—George!"

He beckoned to a long-limbed youth distinguished by a generous top-knot of hair on the crown of his head, the rest of his skull being innocent of hirsute adornment.

"This one will be Curly George. He can look after the tripod."

He showed the boy how to unstrap and open out the cumbersome wood and steel contraption. Roddie is no linguist, but he can accomplish miracles by sheer force of personality and pantomime.

Following his lead, I suggested that the young gentleman from beneath whose riga there peeped out coily an antique relic of a white man's vest might be known as "Waistcoat George."

A swollen face caused by an abscess on the gum accounted for "Toothache George," and a rather Mongolian cast of countenance decided us on "Chinese George" for number four. Finally there was "Dripping-face George," whose face really did drip with an awful persistency.

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These names, invented more or less as a joke, passed into history. In a very short time the owners answered to them, as they also learnt to pick out and hand to Roddie various lenses, the camera handle, full and empty film magazines, and numerous other articles when required. In fact, but for their exasperating capacity for instantly and profoundly falling asleep, regardless of time and place, they would have been a highly successful staff.

The camera now set up and trained on the entrance to the valley, Roddie continued to potter about, as cameramen always can, while I strained my eyes in vain for a sight of the pagans. It was nearly midday. The sun was directly overhead.

"Can't shoot in this light if they do come," complained Roddie. "No shadows. Too flat. We'll have to wait a bit."

Willy-nilly we waited some more.

I made a mental note to have one of the houseboys standing by with a supply of drinks in future.

At length, some four and a half hours after the stipulated time, the pagans began to dribble in. As they came up the valley in increasing numbers they made a brave show, riding their stocky little ponies and filling the valley with dust from the sun-baked ground.

As soon as they saw the three men below, they uttered wild shouts and whoops and, breaking into a gallop, swept down on them, pulling their ponies up short upon their haunches in a smother of dust. They were marvellous, if ruthless horsemen, possessing a

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perfect natural seat even on the roughest ground. Without saddle or stirrups, they maintained control of their sturdy little mounts with a single rein and the sharp prongs protruding from their steel leggings.

Following the horsemen came little groups on foot. They were fine big men, all of them, muscled like tigers, with the sinews rippling beneath their red-streaked skins.

Ignorant as yet of the length of time during which their interest and attention could be held, Barkie delayed the complicated process of explaining the details of the action required, in the hope that still greater numbers would roll up. Plainly we were very far short of the promised four hundred.

Another hour dragged past.

It is true that small companies continued to drift in, but gradually it dawned on us that at the same time the earlier arrivals, becoming bored, were steadily melting away.

Realizing the value of first impressions, Barkie then decided to start rehearsing at once with those available. It was important also, before attempting any big scenes, to find out what amount of bloodthirsty action could be extracted without the risk of the pagans getting out of hand and seizing the opportunity to pay off a few old scores among themselves, or, worse still, turning upon our own little party. After all, they were raw savages of small mental stability. Many of them had a vivid recollection of the real thing. Carried away by the excitement of the moment, it would be small wonder if they kicked over the traces of make-

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believe, and little imagination was needed to picture the possible results.

The situation required very delicate handling. But our spokesman, the Major, was wise and experienced, and Musa an excellent standby.

The pagans gathered round, their chiefs to the fore. Truant parties crept out from the shelter of the trees and from neighbouring groups of rocks. Soon all were listening attentively to the Major's words.

We had planned to take first the scenes of Dawiya's men streaming down from his compound and up the valley to the attack on Peter Allison, the District Officer, and subsequently the arrival from the opposite direction of the loyal Angas to the rescue.

Starting modestly, Barkie had small parties sent up among the rocks. At a given signal, uttering loud and savage cries, they came bounding down. The action was good, but many of them wore broad grins, while others frankly abandoned themselves to helpless laughter. This would not do. After due remonstrance from the Major, they were sent back, and once more the signal was given.

At the third attempt, results were much more promising. It seemed they had got the idea. Moreover, there were now several hundred warriors in the valley, all eager and interested.

Barkie put his megaphone to his lips and directed it up at the White Rock.

"Are you all set, Roddie?" he shouted.

"Yes!" bellowed Roddie.

"I'm going to send all these fellows right up the





REHEARSAL



THE DESCENT FROM DAWIYA'S COMPOUND

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valley and bring them down again past you. They're to be Angas coming to the rescue. Sequence P. Take a chance on it without rehearsal."

Roddie signified that it was O.K. and "panned" round so that the camera faced up the valley. I looked up the scene number in my script and chalked it on the board for him to photograph.

"This'll be the first *and* the last shot to-day," remarked Roddie. "The light's fine now, but it won't last much longer."

It took some time to round up all the pagans and get them up to the starting point, but at last all was ready. In the distance we saw Barkie wave his handkerchief as the signal to start. The three white men and Musa then darted behind some rocks and, three hundred strong, the Angas warriors came thrusting down the valley to do battle with their hereditary enemies, the Suras.

A rolling cloud of dust marked their tempestuous advance. Outrunners danced backwards and forwards with poised spears and bows drawn to the full, crouching, leaping, and shouting their battle songs.

Then came the king, and behind him the main body of his warriors.

Roddie turned steadily, while I crouched beside him in an agony of excitement. Even the Georges sat up and took notice.

The air was full of the reek of sweat and the confused din of cow-horns blown with deep-chested power. Horsemen darted about on the flanks, spear-points and axe-blades flashed in the sun. It was a stirring and

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intoxicating spectacle—a backward glance at the savagery from which these people were only now emerging. Their cries, their movements, and their eagerness to get to grips with the enemy were real, vividly real, to every one of them. Impossible not to be moved, impossible not to speculate what might happen if once we lost control, even for a moment.

That a film of a dramatic nature involving the use of large numbers of natives in battle scenes could be produced at all in this far-off corner of the Bauchi Plateau was a startling tribute to the British Administration represented by the Major. It was only in 1907 that Government officers first penetrated into the Plateau with a view to the ultimate administration and control of this dark region. They were confronted by a wild and rugged land whose mountains teemed with seventy-five separate and determinedly hostile tribes, each speaking a different language, each constantly organized for war. Inter-tribal raids, ambushes, and bloody reprisals were the order of the day, and a man was ranked by the number of human heads or other grim trophies he could display.

Force was taboo, except in the very last resort. Bound by tradition, their task was indeed formidable. Yet in a comparatively short space of time an amazing change took place. And it was accomplished by tact, by patient study and understanding of native mentality, by unassuming courage and icy nerve and, in the overwhelming majority of cases, without show of force. To-day the pagans are living more or less in amity, tribe by tribe.



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It is true that District Officers on the track of some delinquent in distant parts of their huge districts still find themselves isolated among the hills, surrounded by truculent pagans suffering from some fancied grievance, and face to face with situations where a false move or a sign of uncertainty would bring them streaming down the mountains like a pack of wolves. But the D.O. takes it all in his stride. It is part of the day's work.

No stronger evidence can be given of the miracle wrought by the early pioneers, and carried on by the present generation, than the fact that it was considered reasonably safe to call upon the Bauchi pagans to resurrect a tribal war for no better reason than that a handful of white men, who had openly demonstrated that their fire-weapons were harmless, desired to set up a metal box on three legs and turn a handle.

As a matter of fact, apart from our own private production problems, our worst worry was the ingrained habit of unpunctuality exhibited by the pagans on this first day and every other day. No slaves were they to the remorseless hands of a clock. The time of the menfolk was passed in hunting, eating, and smoking huge unwieldy pipes. Not to put too fine a point on it, appetite alone ruled their days.

Many were the fretful hours we spent in the Valley of the White Rock waiting for them to turn up. And when they did arrive, their interest was soon exhausted. After an hour or so, a restless muttering would arise, and one by one they would melt into the landscape. In vain did the Major exhort, threaten, and cajole.

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At first we paid the headmen of the tribes threepence per head per day for every man they brought along. This amount was increased to sixpence, but to no purpose. It should have occurred to us before, but somehow it didn't, that money was of very little use to them. Their wants were few and simple, and could be obtained from the land itself. They wore no clothes. Their ornaments and weapons they manufactured for themselves.

And then one day we had the valley filled with cattle hired from a local Fulani cattle king. The scenes to be taken were of Dawiya's men making a raid on the herds of a neighbouring tribe.

When the dust had subsided and the Fulani herdsmen had corralled the panting beasts, the pagans stood around and cast upon them such glistening, covetous glances that there was no mistaking their meaning.

"I have it," said the Major, slapping his thigh. "We'll pay them in kine!"

As a joke we thought this a pretty poor effort. As a possible solution of our troubles we decided it was at least worth trying. One of the strongest characteristics of the pagan is his inordinate craving for meat, a craving which he is seldom able to indulge to the full, and when the Major informed the headmen that if they would turn out regularly and punctually for a few more days we would dash them a number of bulls, they were ready to do almost anything for us.

The Fulani cattle king, a figure of superb dignity in a cloth of silver gown and turban, seated on a white horse, agreed amiably to supply the necessary beasts,

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and for the next few days we were able to work at top speed. Even the somewhat ticklish scenes of the actual attack on the D.O. were carried out without mishap.

A small tent and camp paraphernalia were placed in the centre of the valley on a flat area bounded on two sides by a deep ditch, or culvert, and on the third by the jutting promontory of the White Rock. Marked by a Union Jack, the lonely camp made a brave little outpost of Empire.

It was early morning, and the scene opened on Haddon peacefully shaving at a mirror pinned to the side of his tent. Down the hill-side and along the ditches, unseen and silent, crept Dawiya's men, the Sura pagans armed to the teeth and very fierce indeed.

Suddenly an arrow pierced the canvas beside the mirror. Startled, but quick to act, the D.O. seized the flag and his two revolvers and made for the shelter of the rocks at the base of the promontory. His carriers scattered in all directions, but his faithful cook, who was in private life the faithful cook of the Major, kept close to his side.

Half-way to cover Haddon tripped over his flag-pole, fell sprawling, and lost his helmet.

This was *not* in the script.

Neither was it in the best traditions of dignity for a D.O. But as he managed to recover himself before the pagans were upon him, Barkie decided to let the scene go on. It all added to the suspense, and Heaven knew it had taken long enough to get the timing right.

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The pagans now sprang from hiding in all directions and, with blood-curdling yells, leapt in pursuit. Haddon, at bay, fired again and again, the cook reloading each revolver as it became empty. It was a desperate stand. Pagans dropped "dead" and lay motionless, as instructed, many of them quivering with suppressed laughter. Spears and arrows fell thick and fast among the rocks. Haddon received a severe "wound" on the arm. While the camera was moved up for close-ups, his shirt was torn and his arm transformed into a gory mess with cocoa and ginger beer.

Later, with the camera among the rocks slightly above and behind Haddon, the pagans made their final charge before the arrival of the Angas to the rescue. From my position beside Roddie, I could not repress a shudder at the bloodthirsty and menacing aspect of these dark and savage people. How very easily they could demolish the lot of us, I thought. And yet, such is the power of the white man, when Barkie raised his megaphone and shouted "Cut!" they immediately relaxed and peacefully awaited further instructions.

Lastly, to link up with the long shot taken from the White Rock on our first day's work, the Angas horsemen were once more brought sweeping down the valley, while Dawiya's men, after some show of resistance, for we did not care to try them too far in actual hand-to-hand conflict against each other, broke loose and retreated up the hill-side, followed by Haddon and the avenging Angas.

Naturally we had our setbacks. Often the sun was

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obscured by clouds. Even a tropical sun has its temperamental periods. And no day's shooting was complete without the film jamming in the camera owing to the heat, or running out at a critical moment. Also a great deal of time was taken up in transferring the camera from one angle to another for repetition of action to form cutting material. Although Roddie was able to develop small ends of film from which to judge the quality of the exposures, and we hoped to receive reports on each consignment of negative as it arrived in England, we were shooting blind to all intents and purposes. Had we been working on a simple travel film, this would not have mattered, but we had a story to put over, and no possibility of returning for retakes, so all action had to be covered as exhaustively as possible.

But many a director has far more trouble with experienced crowd artistes in the studios at home than Barkie had with the pagans. Utterly unselfconscious, once they understood what was required of them, they acted with astounding verve and abandon, spurred on, no doubt, by the thought of the feast that was to come.

In dealing with simple people, as with children, if confidence and trust are to be retained, promises must be carried out promptly and to the letter. And so, although we still had need of small crowds of pagans for more peaceful scenes, we decided to weigh out the live stock at the end of the promised three days.

The Fulani herdsmen had been told to assemble their beasts in the open space behind the round rest-

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house, and after the usual four o'clock luncheon-tea, we strolled over to commence operations.

In a smother of dust and confusion a dozen bulls, each in charge of a herdsman, awaited their fate. Ordinarily meek and dejected, they now pranced and strained at their halters with frantic energy. It seemed as though they sensed the blood lust of the pagans who were streaming in on all sides in numbers at least three times in excess of the men we had employed.

The Major and Barkie at once commenced to bargain with the Fulani headman—shrewd bargaining, carried on in the traditional native fashion with many compliments, lies, and evasions. The Fulani were in a strong position. They knew they were our only means of obtaining a commodity which we had pledged ourselves to hand over to the pagans.

Meanwhile, on a little table beneath a tree, I began to set out the money in piles of shillings, sixpences, and threepenny pieces. In the background, watching with greedy eyes and keeping up a continual hubbub of talk, the pagans pressed closer in ever-increasing numbers. Roddie was busy with a still camera, getting publicity pictures, and Haddon, his gun really loaded this time, stood on guard beside me.

At length Barkie and the Major approached with the headman. Twelve beasts had been purchased, and the price agreed upon was £25.

I proceeded to count out the amount.

The pagans, realizing that this marked the conclusion of the transaction, began to surge forward and, but for some sharp words from the Major, those

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nearest would have seized the now terrified animals and made off with them then and there.

However, comparative order was restored and the distribution commenced. Had I been asked to distinguish one pagan chief from another, I should have been completely defeated. But the Major seemed to recognize them all, and eventually, village by village, they received their share.

The first act of each group was to tie grass ropes round the legs of their animal and start to drag it away. But many could restrain their appetites no longer. In record time the beasts were killed, skinned, and cut up. Not a scrap was wasted. The most revolting portions of offal were seized upon as delicacies, while the hide and horns were claimed by the chiefs.

Here and there tempers ran high. Smeared and bespattered with blood from head to foot, one little group of men began to quarrel. In a flash, knives were out, and there is not the slightest doubt that murder would have been done had not the Major intervened.

Many of the men, after a hasty cooking operation, devoured their share there and then. The cooking process was little more than a formality. A few handfuls of dried grass were collected and arranged in a heap on the ground. Placing on this a hunk of flesh weighing perhaps three or four pounds, they fired the grass. It flared and burned up. As soon as the last flame was dead, in a matter of a few moments, the meat was removed. It could not even have been

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warmed through, but to see the men seize and wolf it down was to realize that to them it was ambrosia.

Later that evening, when peace reigned once more and we were enjoying a drink on the verandah, there was a sudden loud outcry and frantic bellowing.

We rushed out into the compound to see one of the bulls stampeding wildly towards the resthouse followed by a crowd of shrieking pagans hurling spears and ropes. The poor beast was a mass of gaping wounds and very nearly exhausted. It staggered past, and was forced to surrender about a quarter of a mile away. We followed up and took over the distribution of the meat.

The pagans were pushed and shoved into a ring while we stood in the centre near the meat, which was now covered with every kind of dirt and filth, and scarcely recognizable. Hunks of it were handed out, man by man. All went well until the men at the far side of the circle, fearing that the supply would not hold out until their turn came, could stand the suspense no longer.

At first there was just a shuffling of feet and general air of unrest. Then one man, less patient than the rest, reached out his hand.

That was enough.

Before one could say "knife," the whole crowd made one concerted blackguard rush—and the rest of the meat was not.

That night we paid still further for our generosity. The event was celebrated till dawn with a ceaseless beating of drums echoing through the hills and rising



## *Behind the Camera*

at times to a perfect frenzy of excitement. Lying in my small camp bed, I felt a strange stirring of the pulses. My heart began to pound and thump in sympathy with the wild, barbaric rhythm, and it was many hours before sleep finally overtook me.

## Chapter Eleven

THERE was no early call next morning. Indeed, there was no call at all that day, which was just as well, for we had all spent a very disturbed night and were feeling not a little liverish in consequence. With one exception, it seemed.

The Major, who regularly messed with us, had formed the habit of heralding his arrival with song. Maybe it is an old Scottish custom. Anyway, at half-past eight he came stepping briskly round the corner, his voice uplifted in what seemed to me unnecessary boisterousness on this particular occasion :

“Hie, hie, hie, come away, come awa’,  
I’ve got the finest bargains that you ever never saw;  
From a needle to a thimble I am willing to supply,  
So come and get your money ready, buy, buy, buy!”

Up the steps and round to his seat at the head of the table marched this unquenchable songster, pausing only to give me a hearty slap on the back.

“Good morning!” I choked, slopping my tea into the saucer.

“Morning, Major,” put in Barkie quickly, while Haddon winked at me from behind a huge slice of paw-paw.

Roddie appeared in the doorway. “Oh, *boy*, I’ve

## *Behind the Camera*

got a pain!" he groaned, making his way to the filter with his morning glass of Eno.

Apparently unaware of any slight tension in the atmosphere, or perhaps, as an old Coaster, accepting it as a normal state of affairs, the Major settled down to his breakfast.

"Well, boys and girls, what's the programme for to-day?" he enquired with gusto.

It appeared that Barkie had no shooting plans. So far as he was concerned, the day was to be devoted to the completion and equipment of Dawiya's compound on the hill-side in the Valley of the White Rock. In actual fact, I think the absence of reply to our cabled ultimatum to the studio had persuaded him to hold his horses until the mail arrived. At any rate, the lorry was standing by for a journey to Jos on a number of errands, including a visit to the post office.

Hearing this, Haddon announced that if his services were not required, he would like to occupy a seat on the lorry. It must be explained that Haddon had left a brand-new wife in England. He spent a considerable part of each evening writing to her. Nobody minded that—indeed the Major seemed quite touched by his youthful ardour—but when it was discovered that the fortnightly mail bag was to be weighed down with no less than fourteen separately stamped and bulky envelopes all directed to this same lady, the remarks passed were not entirely sympathetic. They were endured, however, with smiling though somewhat shamefaced fortitude.

As yet the faithful scribe had received no response

## *Behind the Camera*

from his lady, but a mail was due. And so, shortly after breakfast, seated beside the driver of the open lorry, Haddon waved a jaunty farewell and bumped off down the dusty road. Poor darling, it was the last jaunty thing he did for a number of days.

Breakfast over, the Major faded away to his own quarters. I fancy the prospect of a day's leisure was not entirely unwelcome to him, despite his heartiness.

And Roddie—well, there was never much doubt as to how he would employ any spare daylight hours that came his way. Whenever Roddie was missing, all you had to do was to stroll in the direction of the garage hut and call his name.

No intelligible response would be made, but a muffled bellow would issue forth. Closer inspection would reveal the Overland supporting Jos, the cook, and a selection of the houseboys in various attitudes of idle curiosity, while Balaclava and his assistant, lying on their stomachs alongside, proffered eloquent but quite incomprehensible advice.

Roddie's legs alone would be visible, but his voice would be heard enquiring with resigned bitterness, for instance, what evil genius had prompted Balaclava to replace a worn clutch lining with one manufactured from fragments of a rusty kerosene can.

Left to myself, I bethought me of my domestic duties. For some moments I had been aware of a patient white-robed figure at my elbow. I knew only too well what he wanted. Reluctantly I turned to him.

"Good morning, Ma," beamed Owdu, with a slight bow. "What you like for chop?"

## *Behind the Camera*

With a clatter of the keys at my waist I rose and led the way to Chop Box Alley.

At this time my housekeeping experience was absolutely *nil*, and I should have been considerably put out by this question even if I had had all the resources of the London housewife at my command. Here my scope was limited indeed.

Confronted by boxes of tinned butter, bacon, vegetables, biscuits, kippers, and fruit, to say nothing of flour, soap, knife powder, soup, margarine, tea, and boot polish, I racked my brains for some new combination of the contents. My mood inclined me to stand or fall by a selection from the first box I could open. Results might be novel, if not exactly appetizing.

My face must have betrayed the complete absence of inspiration, for Owdu, with the benign air of one about to solve all my difficulties, put forward the suggestion for which he could always be relied upon.

"How 'bout salmon s'cakes, Ma?" he ventured.

Fish cakes were numbered among Jos's less unpalatable efforts but . . . fish cakes *again*? I shook my head. So Owdu trotted out his other idea.

"Shicken pie, Ma? I go for market, get two good shicken from my brudder," he urged.

I gave up the struggle. Owdu's "brudder" would soon be able to retire. And judging by the variety of raiment in which he had lately been seen, Owdu himself was not doing so badly. Some of us were still quivering from the shock of his early morning appearance, some days before, in a startling emerald green robe and turban many sizes too large for him, from

## *Behind the Camera*

which his face shone forth, luminous with pride and pleasure.

I consulted my lists for the whereabouts of flour, butter, and salmon. Patiently at first, but with mounting irritation I began to fit the beastly little keys into the unmentionable little padlocks.

Watching me, Owdu remarked experimentally, "Alfred say soap no live."

"You had soap for Alfred yesterday," I replied crossly. "What's he doing—eating it?"

My heavy irony was mistaken for great wit. Owdu went off to do his marketing chuckling richly. He had tried it on unsuccessfully, but he bore me no malice.

All this time I had been endeavouring to ignore a large bowl of opaque, greasy water in which Buggerlugs was preparing to wash up the breakfast things. Our daily ration was little enough with which to make soda water and tea for four thirsty people, provide them with two baths daily, wash their linen and cook their meals, so that it was useless for me to protest against twice, or even thrice-used washing-up water.

When approached for increased supplies the Sariki Bariki, who kept his right forearm in a gourd and was reputed to be in an advanced state of leprosy, shook his head and waved the offending member in protest. "You cannot get blood from a stone," said he, or words to that effect.

My next routine job was to make certain that all the bedding had been put out in the sun, so that none of us might find a scorpion lurking in a bed which had



RIDING TO THE LOCATION



ASSEMBLING IN THE VALLEY





## *Behind the Camera*

been undisturbed since the previous day. These pests are definitely dangerous. A sting causes exquisite pain and often partial paralysis.

One night Barkie found an enormous scorpion beside his bed. He was about to squelch it with his heel when Owdu ran in and snatched the creature up in his fingers. To Barkie's astonishment, it did not sting him, although its tail curved wickedly upwards as if to strike. Calmly Owdu bent his head and spoke to it, at the same time directing with his finger its progress up and down his bare arm.

No scorpion ever stung him, he declared. When he was a child, his father had allowed him to be stung four or five times, and this had made him immune. Strangely enough, though careless of their powers in life, in death he accorded them the greatest respect. Whenever he found one lurking in a dark corner of the resthouse, he would carefully pick it up and place it outside in a bush or tree. He said that if he killed one he would immediately have a very bad attack of fever. If he found a dead scorpion, or saw anybody kill one, he would wrap it up in a piece of white cloth and bury it carefully, murmuring some kind of prayer over it. He called himself Abokin Konama—brother of the scorpion.

Mathematics were never my strong suit. And of that hated trio, arithmetic, algebra, and geometry, my worst enemy was ever the first-named. Many were the bitter tears I shed over my homework. Varied and ingenious the schemes I evolved to escape from the classes of Miss A., whose despair I remained to the

## *Behind the Camera*

end of my schooldays. But there was no escape from my duties as accountant to the production unit. I had faithfully recorded every item of expenditure from "12 bulls—£25" to "2 gallons beer for Sarikin Tsafi—6d." but a day of reckoning was overdue.

So now I got out my account books and the bags of literally filthy lucre from the tin trunk in my room, and passed a most unhappy morning. And it was but small comfort to reflect that from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. nearly every day my safe was left unprotected from the attentions of any one of the houseboys who cared to try his skill as a lock-picker.

Nor were my desperate jugglings made easier by the operations of a company of thatchers engaged in repairing the holes in the roof. Showers of dirt and all manner of creeping things fell all round me as the craftsmen and their assistants crawled up and down. As usual, their numbers bore little relation to the speed with which the work proceeded. Tongues, however, were working overtime. Our arrival in Panyam had caused an unprecedented boom in the building trade. Maybe this was the subject under discussion.

First there had been the storehouse, which stood on the left of the compound with the road to the village passing behind it. Here, under lock and key, were our supplies of petrol, kerosene, and surplus stores of all descriptions.

Then Roddie had commanded a darkroom. And lo, after much chattering and running to and fro and the expenditure of about 11s. 6d., there rose up a

## *Behind the Camera*

small circular hut with extra thick walls and a double grass roof.

Laden with magazines containing the day's takes and shiny tins of new or raw negative for to-morrow's use, Roddie nightly entered this small mud hovel.

The man who loads the magazines, packs up the exposed negative and sends it home for development, is one of the unrecognized heroes of every film of tropical adventure. It is only one of his many duties, but it is perhaps the most trying and responsible. Thousands of pounds, months of toil and planning are tied up in those precious rolls of celluloid.

Disposing his freight methodically on the packing-case table, Roddie visualizes carefully the exact position of everything—the magazines to be emptied, the fresh film to be loaded into them, the space for the empty tins, black paper and sticky tape for the final packing.

All this is photographed on his mind, for he must work by sense of touch and memory alone.

This done, he adjusts the grass mats and black cloth over the doorway, making sure that no chink of light can possibly enter.

It is unfortunate that a colony of super-ants have taken up their abode in this impromptu laboratory. Doubly unfortunate that unavoidably he crushes several underfoot, for they are of the variety known locally as "stink-ants."

A most intolerable smell immediately pervades the stifling atmosphere.

Denied the comfort of tobacco—for he may not

## *Behind the Camera*

strike a match or display the red glow of a cigarette—Roddie uncovers a thousand-foot roll of exposed negative. From the end he clips a length of about eight inches and places it carefully on one side for development. Owing to the peculiar light conditions in this part of the world it is necessary to make exhaustive exposure and filter tests almost daily.

With the sweat pouring down his neck and arms, he struggles on and uncovers a corresponding length of raw stock and begins the double change-over.

About this time, a squadron of very large hornets makes a descent from the grass roof. To open the door and retreat will cost the expedition some fifteen hundred pounds. Swearing steadily, Roddie works on. The hornets are immensely intrigued.

In these distracting circumstances he must still proceed with the greatest caution. The rolls must not be unwound too fast or friction will cause electrical discharges to photograph themselves in tiny lightning flashes down the film. At the same time, the delicate film surface is easily damaged by excessive handling. Dust must be kept from it, or scratches will result.

When finally he emerges he has been mewed up, not for a day and a night, as he might pardonably fancy, but for one hour. He may possibly admit that he has been a bit uncomfortable. He is just as likely to assert that he has had far worse times carrying out the same work beneath improvised tents of blankets in hotel bedrooms at home.

The third and largest building enterprise sponsored by us was Dawiya's village on the hill-side above the

## *Behind the Camera*

Valley of the White Rock. Securely hidden among the rocks, the little hamlet, complete with corn bins and chicken coops, cost no more than five pounds, and sprang into being in little more than a week.

Provided there is ensured a continuous supply of earth mixed with water to the consistency of dough, a hut can be built in less than a day. At this rate it will not be properly dried off, of course, but we were only concerned with the look of the thing.

The site for each hut having been chosen, a circle of the required size is traced with a stick or a big toe in the dust. This line is then scooped out and the channel thus formed is filled with closely packed round balls of mud about the size of a cricket ball. When a second layer of these balls has been laid above the surface of the ground, the flexible brown hands with their surprising pinkish palms coax loose mud into the crevices and square it off, leaving both sides quite flat.

This process continues until the desired height is reached, when the top of the wall is sealed up. A rough cone-shaped construction of bamboo is then fitted on to the wall, and on to this again, with much manœuvring, shouting, and shuffling of bare feet in the dust, there is lifted the pointed grass thatch which has already been made and shaped for the purpose.

A constant stream of men, women, and children bring the prepared mud in baskets on their heads. Dumping it in heaps wherever it is needed, they file off with their empty baskets for further supplies. Four or five men work on each wall, while a company

## *Behind the Camera*

is told off to make the mud balls. The roof bamboos and grass thatches appear as if by magic, and I should imagine that their construction is a spare-time occupation.

When Barkie came back late that afternoon he announced that the village was now complete. Tomorrow we would commence the sequence where the District Officer discovers Dawiya overcome by the potency of Fernandez's bribes of fire water. It would be an easy start for Dawiya, since he merely had to lie in an attitude of drunken abandon outside his hut. The only other requirements were a few headmen to dress the set and an interpreter to accompany the D.O.

But Haddon's movements were observed to be curiously stiff when he climbed from the lorry on his return from Jos that evening. The following morning his legs and arms were scarlet and swollen to gigantic proportions. To move at all was agony. To walk was out of the question. Nine hours' exposure on the journey to and from Jos had given him a dose of sunburn which put him out of action for several days. He had ample time to read the batch of letters he had collected. No doubt they were a comfort to him. He certainly needed some consolation.

The mail also included a brief cablegram from the studio instructing us to carry on with our own plans. And so, feeling surprisingly flattered by this withdrawal of opposition, we filled in the time until Haddon's recovery with scenes between Dawiya and the witch doctor.

Yilkuba was a witch doctor by profession and

## *Behind the Camera*

hereditary right. He was an important man in his tribe, a high priest, and possessed of considerable powers. Yet nowhere could one wish to meet a more straightforward, simple, and gentlemanly old fellow. His dignity was real and unassumed, and he maintained it at all times, though he was called upon to do many things which must have seemed to him utterly incomprehensible.

He soon became used to posing before the camera, his naturally slow and deliberate manner making him easy to photograph and contrasting admirably with the virile and impulsive personality of Dawiya. No matter how many times he was put through his paces, he showed no signs of boredom or impatience.

In appearance he was tall and rather stooping. Though he was thin, his bones were large, and in his prime he must have been a magnificent figure of a man. His hair had never been cut or combed. It hung to his shoulders in tight, grizzled corkscrews like a mass of weather-beaten dark green chenille or a very old floor-mop.

He had a mild, benevolent expression and a kindly smile, and was altogether as far removed from the generally accepted idea of a witch doctor as one could possibly imagine. He wore a loin-cloth and a very fine leopard skin slung across his back. A long staff accentuated the patriarchal note, and he was seldom to be seen without his pipe, the stem of which was about a yard long and three inches in diameter, and made of thorn-encrusted wood, with a bowl the size of a breakfast cup. Into this we thrust at frequent

## *Behind the Camera*

intervals a heaped-up double handful of Capstan Medium, which was received with a gracious nod and smile. With this he was entirely satisfied as a reward for his services.

During the periods when we were using him, Yilkuba had to be boarded out in Panyam village—a circumstance which created a major problem in the commissariat department, since his only form of subsistence seemed to be a species of native beer made by his own tribe. This beverage had to be procured for him in large tulas—earthenware pots standing about eighteen inches high and holding a couple of gallons. The old gentleman would polish off two of these in a day with the greatest ease and no visible effect.

Of the two, Dawiya had the more exacting part to play, and he certainly more than fulfilled the promise shown by his first test in the resthouse compound. So wholeheartedly did he throw himself into his work that it was even necessary at times to restrain him from overacting. Greed, cunning, anger, intoxication and the resultant blustering Dutch courage were all duly registered without a trace of selfconsciousness, while Yilkuba ably played up to him with dark forebodings and warnings of trouble to come.

In due course Haddon was able to get about again, and by him Dawiya was discovered drunk in his compound. In these scenes Musa, whom we suspected of having been for some time torn between a desire to appear before the camera and a feeling that the dignity and authority of his position as production manager



## *Behind the Camera*

would be thereby undermined, was now invited to take the part of Haddon's interpreter.

Fortunately it was a very small part, for Musa was no John Barrymore. His movements became jerky and awkward; again and again, as though by magnetic attraction, his eyes would wander to the camera, and he frequently broke off in the middle of a simple piece of action and stood baffled and helpless, his mind a complete blank.

And so, after one unhappy excursion into the realms of make-believe, Musa was kept extremely busy on the production side, where he continued to show remarkable powers of organization, as the following note will show.

"G. Barkas, Esq.  
Resthouse,  
Panyam.

Very well please. I will be arrange for all this just now and let you have the two runners to go to Jos also fifty pegans that you can use them in Dawiya's compound. And also everything will be ready in Dawiya's compound as well, goats, sheeps, horses and dogs and so on that you will be use them in Dawiya's compound.

Your obediently,

MUSA KATAGUM."

This businesslike communication was the prelude to one of the most exasperating days we experienced in the whole trip.

## *Behind the Camera*

At 8.30 a.m., when we trailed along the valley and scrambled up the hill-side to Dawiya's village, it was unusually sultry. Not a breath of air stirred the trees that huddled on the banks of the empty stream. Roddie scanned the hard metallic brilliance of the sky and turned down his mouth at the sight of several little groups of clouds lazily converging on the sun. The Georges, taking advantage of his momentary inattention, deposited their loads where they were most likely to cause an obstruction, and wisely drifted out of sight.

"Ready on the lot at sunrise," or words to that effect, had been Barkie's instructions regarding the old men, women, and children selected to populate the village.

They were nowhere to be seen.

Fifty Sura warriors were to have been standing by in the valley. They also were conspicuously absent.

Musa, lamenting this unpunctuality but declining, however, to be held responsible, sought to distract Barkie and glorify himself by displaying the domestic animals he had gathered together. To give him his due, he had done quite well, for the pagans set great store by their animals and were not easily persuaded to part with them, even for a few hours.

Regarded by English standards they were a sorry spectacle all the same. Three haggard ponies swished dejected tails in vain attempts to dislodge the flies from the gaping wounds in their flanks. Tethered among the rocks, half a dozen goats strained and nibbled after such bushes as were within their reach. Three or four half-starved pi-dogs made sudden ferocious

## *Behind the Camera*

onslaughts on their unwanted guests from the insect world, and a score of scraggy chickens pecked philosophically in the dust.

An hour slipped by. By this time we were accustomed to being kept waiting and wasted no nervous energy in fretting at the delay. Seated on a boulder, Barkie explained to the Major and Musa the nature of the scenes to be taken and the manner in which he wished his artistes to be disposed. This was to be the flight of Dawiya's people before the victorious Angas.

Roddie and I availed ourselves of a minor distraction provided by Haddon, who permitted us to assist him in the fascinating process of peeling sheets of skin from his arms and legs.

At length the villagers began to trickle in, appearing suddenly and silently from all around. Down in the valley a small gathering of warriors collected.

Roddie set up a cry for the Georges.

As the crowd increased, a confused clatter of tongues arose. Dogs yapped and babies wailed. Roddie's shouts, rising above the hubbub, resulted in the presence of Chinese and Curly George, sulky and languid.

Now the Major and Musa moved among the pagans and began grouping and instructing them in the action required. As the scene took shape and further ideas suggested themselves, Barkie stood up on his boulder, megaphone to lips, and shouted further directions. Now and then he leapt down and vividly enacted a small scene before a gaping audience.

The heat was terrific in the enclosed space. The

## *Behind the Camera*

still air was heavy with the smell of live stock and the pungent odour of the sons and daughters of Africa. No doubt they were finding equally distasteful the odour of mutton which is said by the natives to emanate from white people. I lifted my helmet, wiped my forehead, and regretted a second helping of grapenuts with bananas and neat Nestlé's milk which I had disposed of at breakfast.

Haddon, who had been made up since eight o'clock, gazed despairingly into his mirror and began to discuss with Roddie the advisability of returning to the rest-house to remove from his face what had now become a slithering yellow paste, and substitute a fresh make-up. With one eye on the clouds, Roddie opined that there would probably be no take at all anyway.

At this point there rose a shrill dispute between two damsels whose part in the proceedings now being rehearsed consisted of a hurried dive into one of the huts to retrieve some household goods. Excessive zeal had caused them to become jammed in the narrow doorway, where they remained kicking and squealing until sorted out by Musa.

At the same moment one of the pi-dogs got loose and set up a frantic commotion among the chickens, who fled, squawking and flapping their wings, in all directions.

No sooner had the dog been recaptured and the chickens coaxed back with illusory promises of refreshment—both these operations creating the wildest confusion among the "artistes" and causing a further half-hour's delay before they were all back in position

## *Behind the Camera*

—than the little bank of clouds caught up with the sun and slowly and inexorably effaced it.

“George! Bring my reflectors!” commanded Roddie.

Toothache and Dripping-face having manifested themselves, the reflectors, sheets of white cotton stretched between bamboo poles and requiring two people to hold them in position, were placed where the fullest advantage might be taken of any stray gleam of sunshine.

Despite all these setbacks, rehearsals proceeded until at last Barkie was satisfied that the scene would run with a reasonable degree of co-ordination and the requisite atmosphere of fear and haste. Happily the clouds had now dispersed.

“Right!” said Barkie, leaping back on to his boulder alongside the camera. He shaded his eyes and looked up at the sun. “This time we’ll take. Are you all set, Roddie?”

“All set, bo,” replied Roddie, taking a last look through the camera and placing his fingers lightly on the handle.

“Away we go then.”

Musa gave the signal to start the action. The ponies, goats, and dogs were released.

“Turn!” shouted Barkie, and the rhythmical whirling of the camera commenced.

Almost holding our breath, we watched while events proceeded with un hoped-for smoothness. Goats and ponies were driven past the camera, women and children hurried panic-stricken from their huts, old men followed as best they might. The two damsels,

## *Behind the Camera*

their former quarrel forgotten, dived into their abode and emerged with their baskets of grain. From behind the camera at a given signal the defeated Sura warriors from the valley began to stream through the village. Roddie cranked steadily, his eyes watchful.

"George!" he bellowed, as Chinese began to nod, "hold up that reflector!"

Whether Chinese obliged or not, I cannot remember, for at that moment, from the foremost hut in the direct line of the camera there emerged the yawning, stretching figure of Waistcoat George.

Some faint echo of his master's voice must have penetrated his dreams. There he stood, in his dirty white riga and ancient tweed waistcoat, dazed but amiable. Nothing could have been more incongruous among the naked pagans.

"Cut!" yelled Barkie, flinging his megaphone to the ground and calling upon the Almighty to witness this crowning stupidity.

Sublimely unaware of the crisis precipitated by his appearance, Waistcoat grinned engagingly and rubbed the sleep from his eyes. But the grin was short-lived. Three infuriated white men bore down upon him with an aspect so menacing and a denunciation so deadly that he took to his heels and fled. On his reappearance a week later he received twelve lashes with the balala at the hand of his tribal chief and returned to our fold a chastened man.

I had already remarked that in times of stress Barkie found some strange comfort in the hurling of stones. By the time the scene was reorganized nearly an hour

## *Behind the Camera*

had passed, and the far side of the valley was the richer by several score of small rocks and pebbles.

The rest of the day passed comparatively peacefully. Close-ups and cut-in shots were successfully obtained, and then Haddon entered the deserted village where Yilkuba alone remained, shaking his head, the very picture of "I told you so."

The concluding episode of this sequence, the firing of the village, was necessarily scheduled for some time ahead, because there were scenes yet to be taken of Fernandez and Dawiya together, and Reggie Fox was not due at Panyam for another week.

So I took careful note of Haddon's appearance and the general circumstances of his entry into the village before we packed up for the day.

The sun was casting long shadows as we straggled down the valley. The seats of the car were burning hot, but we climbed in and sank down thankfully—all except Haddon, who set off with his shot-gun and the declared intention of getting a guinea-fowl for dinner. The derisive remarks which pursued him were directed not so much at his marksmanship as at his lack of discrimination. Similar announcements on previous evenings had resulted in some singularly repellent specimens of the vulture family, causing hysterical giggles on the part of Owdu, but nothing for the pot.

The camera gear having been stowed on to the lorry, Roddie took his seat at the wheel of the Overland, and the Georges automatically lined up behind.

"Push 'em!" we cried.

The Georges pushed.

## *Behind the Camera*

Cough, splutter, jerk, jerk, jerk. We were off.

On the way home we approached a large flock of hump-backed sheep grazing on the bare brown stubble. Each animal bore on its back a large white tick-bird, pecking away industriously. The rattle and clank of the car alarmed the birds. With one accord they took to the air, their spreading wings tinged with pink from the setting sun. It was a lovely sight—one of those little cameos of beauty that remain in the memory for ever.

At the resthouse Owdu welcomed us with that wide and friendly grin which, combined with the restrained manner of a well-trained butler, made him such an attractive old rascal.

"What you like for drink, Ma?" he enquired.

"Tea, Owdu!" was the general cry.

Helmets were removed from sticky brows, tired bodies were flung into the long chairs, and the cool gloom of the verandah sank deep into our consciousness. Nobody spoke until Owdu reappeared with the large enamel teapot full of that pale and washy liquid known to him as tea. Biscuits were handed round. Gradually we revived.

The sight of Musa in the compound gazing with half-closed inscrutable eyes in the direction of the boys' huts presently reminded me of a delicate domestic contretemps which had to be dealt with. It had come to our knowledge, I forget exactly how, that Kadiri, the Don Juan of the outfit, had been making highly successful overtures to Musa's wife. Kadiri was Roddie's personal boy, and Roddie had no particular







PAYING-OUT AFTER A DAY'S WORK



PREPARING TO TAKE A SCENE IN DAWIYA'S COMPOUND

*To face p. 165*

## *Behind the Camera*

fault to find with him. He was used to his ways and it would be a nuisance to have to procure and train another boy. On the other hand, Musa was invaluable and must not be upset. We fell to discussing the best way of dealing with the situation.

Maybe we overlooked the fact that Musa understood English almost as well as we did ourselves. Perhaps we underrated his quickness of hearing. At any rate, after a few moments he came quietly over to the foot of the steps. Addressing himself to Barkie, he said lightly and precisely: "I do not mind, sir. There be plenty wooman. I can divorce her and buy another wife. When I meet Kadiri I salute him and say to him 'Good morning.' I do not quarrel with him."

And there the matter ended, so far as we were concerned, but Musa's lofty attitude, steadily maintained, must have caused Kadiri far graver misgivings than open hostility, for a few days later he vanished.

Tea over, all thought of leisure had to be abandoned, for to-night was a mail night.

Roddie made off to his darkroom to pack up the day's take and collect the sealed tins of exposed negative which had accumulated since the last mail; Barkie and I settled down to the fortnightly detailed report and the bringing up to date of accounts and footage schedules.

Mail nights allowed of no time for dallying with baths and cocktails. Even Haddon, returning for once with a pair of speckled guinea-fowl, received scant attention, and dinner took up the briefest possible interval.

## *Behind the Camera*

It was nearly midnight when my typewriter ceased to compete with the shrill chorus of the crickets, and the two runners were summoned from the compound, where they had been patiently waiting in the starlight. They were strong young men, clad only in a loin-cloth, and each carrying a stout staff. At first we had been somewhat dubious about sending parcels of valuable negative out into the bush in this apparently careless manner, but now we watched them lope out of sight, the sealed bags on their backs, without the slightest apprehension. Barring an act of God, we knew that they would be back within three days, bringing the necessary receipts from the post office in Jos, sixty miles away.

## *Chapter Twelve*

THE clouds which had hindered us during the taking of the flight from Dawiya's village proved to be the heralds of a period of grey, unsettled weather which caused production to be spasmodic for several days, and although the locations for the scenes scheduled during that time were all close at hand and could be reached on foot within a few minutes when the light showed signs of improvement, the delay was none the less annoying on that account.

For my own part I must admit, nevertheless, that these clouds had a silver lining, since they provided a little spare time in which to study more closely the habits and customs of the people.

A stroll down the road to the Mohammedan village of Panyam filled in many an interesting half-hour.

Panyam is shaped rather like a bottle with an opening at each end, the whole fenced round by a high palisade of woven grasses. A hundred yards from the resthouse you enter a narrow street of huts, each with its own stockade above which only the roofs can be seen. Fifty yards farther on the street widens into a large open space.

Down the left-hand side of this space the thickly clustered habitations continue, each with its rough stockade and perhaps a courtyard behind, and all placed at different angles. Like the pagan huts, they

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are made of mud and roofed with a grass thatch, but the workmanship is superior and there are attempts at decoration in the form of bold relief patterns on the walls. The majority of these dwellings are round in shape, but many are square or oblong, and the doorways are large enough for an upright entry to be made. Here and there you will see a group of children playing before a hut, or a young girl pounding corn, but the Hausa women are not much in evidence. A glimpse of one will show her to be swathed in a length of coloured cotton from beneath the armpits to the knees, her head being covered by a kerchief or small turban of the same material.

A familiar figure squatting on the threshold of his abode is the Hausa mallaam, or wise man. Usually he is surrounded by a group of persons of all ages, who listen attentively while he recounts the fables and moral stories of which the Hausa language contains so vast a store. Sometimes he is to be found busily writing in Arabic characters while an anxious correspondent sits by his side frowning over the composition of the letter he is unable to write himself.

A large part of the right-hand side of the communal area of the village is taken up by a long, low, barnlike building divided into cubicles by thick mud pillars. Cross-legged on a grass mat before each opening sits a Hausa barber ready to wield his significant knife or triangular piece of steel. For among the pagan tribes hairdressing is not a mere matter of convenience or comfort.

Only the youths may indulge the whim of the

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moment, and very odd are some of the effects achieved by them. A broad tuft of hair running from the forehead to the back of the neck like a hobby-horse is a mode greatly favoured, while an intricate system of minute plaits seems to be much admired. Others again fancy an upstanding ridge of hair all round the head, in the manner of George Robey's stage make-up, and a single isolated top-knot on the crown of the head is evidently considered very chic.

When the responsibilities of fatherhood encompass the young man, however, these frivolities must be set aside, and on the day that he submits his head to be entirely shaven, his fellow-tribesmen may know that his second child has been born.

I saw no pagan women visiting the barber, but their progress to womanhood is marked by no less definite stages. The hair of infants and young girls is allowed to grow an inch or so and is clotted with a peculiar preparation of red earth and grease, forming a kind of pudding. The same preparation is also rubbed over the bodies of the maidens until they assume a shining bronze colour, which is relieved in a pleasing fashion by steel and iron bracelets and necklets. Similar baubles, no more barbarous in appearance, are to be found in the London shops at the present time.

On the day that a pagan girl goes to her husband her head is completely shaved. It may perhaps be some compensation to her that she is then permitted to discard the girdle of plaited leather or fibre thongs passing round the hips and between the legs, which has hitherto denoted her virginity, and assume in its

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place the large bunch of glossy green leaves fore and aft which I found so attractive on my first excursion into the bush.

At this stage she is as alluring as she will ever be, at any rate to European eyes, though she is entitled so to decorate herself to the end of her days. Some married women wear a tight thong round their foreheads, but I was never able to discover the meaning of this, though I have heard that it is supposed to alleviate headache. All these customs are rigidly adhered to, and woe betide the woman who dares to outrage convention by altering the appearance prescribed for her age and station.

But to return to Panyam.

In the centre of the village is a group of tall trees with spreading branches resembling oaks. Beneath these trees and all around them sit the Hausa traders, their wares set out on the ground before them.

Of the three main races in Northern Nigeria, the Hausawa, Fulani, and pagans, the Hausawa are the recognized traders. One might almost call them the middlemen, for they buy from the wandering Fulani herdsmen milk, butter, goats, and sheep which are sought after by the pagans. The pagans are the agriculturists. Maize, guinea corn, millet, and atcha are cultivated by them, and although fruit is very scarce, they are able to bring in limes, sweet potatoes, pawpaw, and bananas. On the roads leading to the villages you may often see a file of pagan women balancing on their heads huge round baskets piled high with pro-



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duce. Each one carries a long staff, and they proceed in a calm and leisurely manner, apparently quite content to be the beasts of burden.

For the European customer the Hausa himself makes beautifully worked leather articles from goat-skin dyed in brilliant shades of green, red, and blue. His brassware is always recognizable by the same interlacing pattern, and is frequently engraved with the name of the craftsman and place of origin, such as "Aiken Amadu Kano," which means "The work of Amadu of Kano." Ivory beads, rugs, and ospreys and ostrich feathers can also be obtained very cheaply if you have time to bargain. But none of these things is displayed in the open market, for they do not attract the native buyer.

Here then sits the Hausa with his calabashes full of beans and kola nuts and his flat trays spread with cubes of a strange delicacy made from the blood of slaughtered beasts cooked with fat and allowed to grow cold. Bowls of Fulani butter and sour milk, flat cakes made from atcha, and piles of meat in an advanced stage of decomposition also figure in his stock, and by his side are stacks of precious salt contained in cylinders of woven fibre.

He is an amiable creature, the Hausa, on good terms with himself, his fellow-trader, and every passer-by. All the time the air is full of greetings.

"Hail!" calls the trader loudly to an advancing acquaintance.

"Hail to you too," comes back the reply in an equally powerful voice.

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"Are you well?" demands the trader, in a slightly less stentorian tone.

"Very well, thank you," is the response.

And thereafter mutual enquiries are made as to prosperity and general news until the passer-by is out of sight and the voices of both have relapsed into a series of meaningless grunts.

Apart from differences of temperature, colour, and dress, or the lack of it, there is astonishingly little to choose between the general deportment in an African village and any small English town on market-day. Little groups of gossiping women drift from one trader to another, comparing the quality and price of the commodities. Young pagan girls, while seeming to giggle appreciatively at each other's confidences, have eyes alert for any who may be observing them. Naked small boys dart in and out among them with shrill screams, playing tricks upon their elders and each other as small boys will all the world over, while the pi-dogs nose over the rubbish and sit down every few moments to scratch themselves with frantic intensity.

But there is no roaring traffic to send the shoppers scampering to the sidewalk, breaking up their pleasant intercourse and drowning the sound of their voices. Neither are there any sparrows to flutter down and help themselves to the food exposed. Only the vultures, sinister and watchful, always alone, survey the scene from the peak of a roof or the dead branch of a tree, biding their time.

Such were my impressions of Panyam under normal conditions. Just at this time, however, the annual

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Fast of Ramadan intervened. I do not pretend to know anything whatever about the religious significance of this period beyond the bare fact that it begins with the new moon and lasts until sight of the next new moon, and that during this time complete abstinence from food, drink, and women is required daily from dawn until sunset.

The daytime *tempo* of life in the village slowed down. It is true that the Hausa traders sat in their accustomed places beneath the trees, but their manner was subdued to sober contemplation, and such conversation as they held was no longer punctuated by jets of the red fluid of the betel-nut.

But as the sun sank down behind the village each evening, little groups of Hausawa and Fulani could be seen standing about with their faces to the west. Many of them had food and drink ready in their hands. Others had but to dart into a near-by hut to assuage their hunger and thirst.

A curious lull ensued.

And then, as the last rosy gleam faded from the sky, the mouths of the Faithful opened as one, and the most enormous meals vanished with incredible speed.

It was then that the village woke up and proceeded to enjoy itself.

As we sat round our lamp-lit table at dinner, the throbbing of drums and the high, chanting wail of native voices drew us by their very monotony. Mingled with the drums, the sweet minor note of the little reed harps could be distinguished and the deeper note of stringed instruments played by means of a sliding ring.

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To this medley of sound, dominated by the drums, young people danced in files of three or four, with arms extended and hands beneath the arms of the person in front. Women with babies on their backs shook and swayed and stamped their feet with small regard for the comfort of their passengers. The little heads rolled from side to side until one felt they were in danger of coming off altogether.

Dignified in robes and turbans, the headmen strolled up and down, smoking and talking, while the mallaams, seated in their doorways, drew crowds of interested listeners far into the night.

On several evenings an additional attraction was provided by a travelling Dodo man. Whether this gentleman ever revealed himself to mortal eyes I do not know. Whenever we saw him he was concealed inside a conical white mask with two holes for his eyes, and a voluminous circular gown reaching to his ankles. With him were two muscular young men who started the entertainment by crouching on the ground and beating a loud tattoo with their fingers on the small drums before them.

When a sufficient number of people had collected, the Dodo man stepped forward and proceeded to indulge in all manner of weird contortions. Nearly all native dances are based, I believe, on traditional legends, or else the performer is supposed to be possessed by a devil or the spirit of a wild animal. Had we been able to interpret them, there is no doubt that the posturings of the Dodo man would have unfolded some kind of story. But to us the most interesting part of his performance was the grand finale.

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Suddenly poising himself on tiptoe, he commenced to revolve with rapidly increasing speed on one foot. At the same time, in the good old music-hall manner, his two satellites began to work up the pace of their drumming. Faster and faster turned the dancer until his gown flew out shoulder-high and he appeared as completely featureless as an enormous spinning top. Wilder and louder beat the fingers of the drummers, their naked bodies glistening with sweat and their bulging eyes fixed upon the whirling figure with an expression of fanatical devotion. It was a most amazing exhibition of physical endurance, lasting, as it frequently did, for fifteen or twenty minutes without ceasing.

As the month wore on and the moon waxed bold and high in the sky, the whole absorbing scene was revealed almost as clearly as though it were daylight, but with a soft, silvery sheen and velvet dark shadows that imparted a beauty unsuspected in the crude light of day.

Yet another aspect of Panyam was vouchsafed to us during the season of Ramadan. Late one night Roddie, who sometimes slept on the verandah, awoke me suddenly by calling loudly for Barkie. A few moments later I heard the two of them conferring anxiously together. Hastily pulling on boots and a dressing-gown, I pushed the boulder from the foot of my door and stumbled out on to the verandah. The sound of the voices now came from the compound. I hurried down the steps, ducked my head under the thatch, and realized instantly that there was serious cause for alarm.

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In the direction of the village the whole of the sky was lit by an ugly red glare. Tongues of flame rose here and there among the pointed roofs, and the night breeze was sending showers of angry sparks steadily towards us.

Behind us in the resthouse and in the little dark-room alongside were thousands of feet of negative film stock—all we had to depend on to finish our film. If the fire spread any farther towards us, those jewel-like sparks would undoubtedly alight on our roof. Already the blaze and crackle of the village roofs was most menacing to hear.

As I stood there, Owdu came running and I heard Barkie order him to rouse the boys and station them round the resthouse with kerosene cans of all the water they could lay hands on, which was precious little at that time of night. Nothing else could be done, unless it became expedient to drag out all our impedimenta and convey it to a safe distance in the car. So we decided to go down to the village and find out how great a hold the fire had taken, and what steps, if any, were being taken to overcome it.

Visions of a demented populace taking to the bush while we, in traditional British style, assumed command and fought the flames unaided, were very soon dispelled. When we arrived, almost suffocated by the heat and stench, the situation was well in hand. Little bands of natives were removing bodily the undamaged grass roofs and placing them to windward of the blaze, while an organized gang had set to work to clear a space around the affected area. Horses, donkeys,

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and goats were being led out from most unexpected places. Little clusters of women and children, surrounded by their household goods, sat disconsolately by the roadside.

Musa approached, leading his bicycle with one hand and a much-valued horse with the other. He said there was nothing we could do. In the dry season fires are no uncommon occurrence, and the natives have learnt to tackle them in a systematic and workman-like fashion.

Gradually the flames died down and, profoundly thankful, we made our way back to the resthouse and to bed.

During the celebrations attendant on the termination of the Fast of Ramadan we were able to witness a ceremony which is now almost extinct and is, in fact, forbidden in most parts of the country.

It was one of those dull mornings, and we were all hanging about the resthouse waiting for the light to improve and feeling, if the truth must be told, a trifle bored and peevish, when a sudden beating of drums in the village roused a flicker of interest. We had had drums in the evening and drums, to our cost, throughout the night, but drums in the morning was a new one. There being nothing else to do at the moment, we straggled down to investigate.

A large crowd was gathered in the market-place, and as we worked our way towards the point from which the drumming seemed to come, we noticed that instead of the usual preponderance of Hausawa with a sprinkling of pagans, there was a strong majority of Fulani.

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Tall and lithe, with their Egyptian cast of feature and coffee-coloured skins, the Fulani are far more attractive than their black-skinned compatriots, and on this occasion all were dressed in their best and brightest. Women and girls were brilliantly swathed in blue, red, and yellow, striped and plain. Heavy gold ear-rings dangled to their shoulders, and dozens of bracelets clattered on their slender wrists. Multi-coloured bead necklaces hung round their necks, and their fingers were adorned with wide metal rings. The handsome, liquid features of the men of rank were set off by robes and turbans of equally dazzling hue.

Through this surging mass of mixed peoples we pressed on until we came to the edge of a large circle of excited spectators.

Inside the circle, kneeling on the ground, a row of drummers beat a slow tattoo on goatskin drums. Facing them, there knelt an old man. Evidently he was the master of this ancient ceremony, for presently at a sign from him the drums broke into a quick, urgent rhythm.

At the same moment five Fulani boys stepped out from the crowd and took the centre of the ring. Naked but for a loin-cloth, slender and graceful, they stood in easy attitudes, each with a sword in his hand.

The drumming now rose to a furious syncopation. Again the crowd parted, and there entered five hefty men carrying wicked-looking pliant whips made from the sinewy root of a tree.

These five, grimly impersonal, took up their stand opposite the youths, who now raised their hands and



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swords above their heads and with eyes gazing straight ahead prepared to submit to the ordeal on which depended the whole of their future life and honour.

With a crash the drums ceased.

Instantly the scourges whistled through the air and curled savagely round the unresisting bodies. Again and again the rough lashes descended, scoring deep cuts across the ribs, but not one of the victims flinched or cried out.

Neither was pity nor enthusiasm exhibited on the faces of the spectators. Women and girls looked on impassively. Such endurance is no more than the tradition of the race demands; it is the test which their sons and suitors must survive if they wish to take their place among grown men.

With the blood streaming down their flanks, the young stoics continued to hold their arms aloft. Two of them took small mirrors from their loin-cloths and held them up before their faces while the blows continued to rain upon them. Not even the flicker of an eyelid must betray a sign of weakness. Another lad went so far as to greet each brutal lash with a sardonic smile and a guttural noise like the prolonged rolling of an "r."

Just as I was beginning to feel my own powers of endurance giving way, one of the boys uttered a low moan and sank to his knees, trying pathetically to ward off further blows with his thin young arms.

Now did the women throw off their apathy. Now did they scream derision and hurl gibes and insults at the wretched creature staggered from the ring, for

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ever disgraced, for ever to be scorned by the dusky beauties and despised by his fellow-men.

He was soon forgotten. As we turned away from this sadistic spectacle another youth sprang forward to prove that he, at any rate, was no weakling, and the ranks of the women closed in.

Ultimately there arrives a point in the Fulani flogging ceremony when the master declares that enough has been borne, and those who have earned their right to the privileges of manhood by their triumph over the flesh withdraw to give place to fresh postulants. This strange prelude to the "coming of age" was carried on throughout the day until dusk brought the time for feasting and celebrating.

## Chapter Thirteen

MY own activities during this slack interlude extended still further into the domestic sphere. Piles of mending and darning came my way. With scissors and clippers I endeavoured to restore to Haddon that well-barbered appearance so essential to the film hero, no matter how primitive the conditions under which he may be supposed to be living. Yelps of agony from the victim attended my efforts, but the results were better than those produced by Owdu on Barkie.

One morning I even went so far as to make a cake, a thing I had never before attempted without the aid of a cookery book and a vigilant maternal eye. The mixing of it in a bowl on the verandah table was closely observed by the entire party, who offered fantastic speculations as to the fate of any who might be bold enough to eat it.

Unfortunately, these speculations turned out to be only too prophetic, but I *still* maintain that the fault lay in the cooking.

Back in Lagos Mrs. Aitken had advised me, "If you haven't time to inspect your kitchen regularly every day, it is far better to remain out of it altogether."

These words came back to me as, cake tin in hand, I stood in Jos's dark little hut and peered round at the piles of dirty saucepans buzzing with flies, and the

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cooking spoons and forks lying about on the ground. The baking arrangements consisted of a wood fire between two kerosene cans bridged by a third can.

Jos favoured me with a very dirty look, took my cake, and placed it in one of these ovens. As I was not prepared to embark upon a tirade regarding the condition of the cooking utensils, I thereupon retired with a sinking feeling which must have instantly communicated itself to the cake, for when, after several visits of inspection, I eventually had it removed, it was beyond even me to eat more than one mouthful.

My duties also came to embrace the role of nurse.

Toothache George, having recovered from the abscess on the gum which had rendered him unsightly for several weeks, now had an encounter with the Overland and sustained a badly gashed foot. This I cleaned as best I could with peroxide and bandaged it neatly, at the same time re-christening him "Hard Luck."

Every evening thereafter, Hard Luck, in a red fez and dirty robe, limped sadly to the resthouse steps and with the pathetic eyes of a stricken deer begged that the mistress of the house would administer healing ointments. Long after the wound was healed he turned up regularly to be re-bandaged for the sheer joy of going about with his foot tied up. Ultimately he was again re-christened "Pathetic," and this name stuck to him to the end.

Another casualty was a diminutive creature with bandy legs who acted as carrier to the district officer in the film. This young gentleman did excellent work

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as comic relief, and was only too pleased to be retained at a salary of sixpence a day for as long as we wanted him.

But alas, he fell sick with fever, and a more miserable and dejected sight it is difficult to imagine. As is usual with the coloured man, he abandoned all hope of recovery, and was firmly convinced that he was about to pass right out.

Hearing of this from Musa, we went to visit him at his hut in the village and found him huddled over a large fire, his teeth chattering and his entire face and body a strange greyish hue. When approached, he rolled his eyes and clutched his tummy and absolutely refused to be comforted. So we sent for some blankets and administered a very large dose of castor oil and some quinine.

Next day he was found to be weak and spent and visibly shrunken. Large fat tears rolled down his face at the mere sight of a bottle of Angier's Emulsion, and it was with the greatest difficulty that we managed to get him to swallow a dose. His confidence in the white man's medicine had been severely shaken!

We persevered grimly with the treatment, however, for unless he recovered we should be let in for half a day's retakes and no end of trouble. In a few days he was about again, but was liable to severe attacks of coughing which could only be soothed, it appeared, by large spoonfuls of emulsion, for which he had developed a strong partiality.

After a week of this comparative idleness, during which only a few short patrol scenes were snatched,

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the weather improved once more, but not before we had held an informal meeting and solemnly discarded our ju-jus. It was probably merely coincidence, but the fact remains that from that day onwards we had no more hold-ups on this score until a tornado heralded the breaking of the dry season. Happily, this improvement in the weather occurred with the arrival of the two remaining members of the cast.

Both Barkie and Roddie were acquainted with Reggie Fox, but none of us had ever met Miss Cowley. We had not even seen a photograph of her. I had several times wondered what she would be like, but "wondering" is not a process commonly indulged in by the male sex, and beyond hoping that she could act and would photograph well, my companions refused to join me in this singularly futile pastime. This did not prevent me from pursuing my reflections privately. After all, except for Mrs. Bovill, the Greek lady at Mr. Clarke's party, I had not come in contact with another white woman since I left Lagos two months ago. To be sure, there were the lady missionaries on the other side of the village, but they had made quite plain their opinion of an unmarried girl living in the bush with four men, and apparently their Christianity was only directed towards saving natives, for they had made no attempt to seek my acquaintance. I had not even set eyes on them, and I was beginning to feel the need of a little feminine society.

Would Miss Cowley be pretty? Most likely. But the face that is lovely on the screen is not always so in real life. Would she mind sharing a room with me?

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Would she be temperamental and up-stage, or would she be a good sort and shake down with the rest of us? These were some of the questions flitting through my mind as I sauntered out into the compound one afternoon and watched the advancing cloud of dust which was the Overland and a Ford lorry full of luggage.

"Here they come!" I shouted, and in a few moments the old car rattled up and jerked to a standstill at the foot of the steps with clouds of steam and a sinister bubbling noise issuing from beneath the bonnet.

Seated beside Roddie was a slight figure in a filmy chiffon gown. From beneath a shady hat a pale oval face looked out. Scarlet lips parted in a smile which revealed small, even white teeth. A little straight nose and large brown eyes completed a picture of delicate prettiness most unusual to behold in these wild surroundings. Roddie leant forward, the door flew open, and a high-heeled slipper was followed by a slim, cobweb-stockinged leg. Hilda Felicity Cowley stood before us.

From the back of the car, hemmed in by quantities of gear, the dark aquiline features of Reggie Fox smiled urbanely. At last the unit was at full strength. We all crowded round and shook hands and asked simultaneously the usual silly questions about voyages and journeys, and failed, as usual, to listen to the replies because we were too busy taking stock.

Later, when they had washed and changed, Reggie gave us a stirring account of their journey from Jos to Barracki-n-Lahadi.

"It was about midnight when we arrived at Jos,"

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he began. "I got out of the train and looked around for somebody to meet us, but I couldn't see a soul. So I checked up all the luggage and we sat on our trunks like a couple of orphans and waited for something to happen. I suppose we'd been sitting there for about half an hour, when Roddie strolled up. He'd been having a meal with a bank manager or somebody."

Roddie grinned. His ability to scrounge meals had become a standing joke in Jos.

"We were awfully pleased to see him, don't y'know," Reggie went on. "John, Miss Cowley's boy, began to gather up our hand luggage, and we'd started to move off when Roddie said, 'Wait a minute, folks,' so we stopped, and he said, all in one piece, 'Look here, I've never driven at night before—in fact, I'd never driven a car in my life until I came out here—it's thirty miles to Barracki-n-Lahadi where we're going to sleep to-night—I'm not at all sure of the way, it's pitch dark, and I haven't any lights.' He stopped to take breath and then added, 'I thought I'd better tell you!'"

When the laughter had died down, Reggie continued: "Well, Miss Cowley didn't say anything, she was too tired to care what happened, and apparently even Roddie drew the line at demanding beds from comparative strangers at 1 a.m., and so we made our way after him across the station yard to the car, followed by Kadiri and John with our light luggage. The rest of the stuff was left to be called for. Of course we couldn't see the car very well—there was only one hurricane lamp hanging on the front of the radiator—



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and Roddie had spared us a description, so without further ado Miss Cowley climbed in the back and rolled herself up in rugs, I got in the front next to Roddie, and Kadiri stretched himself out on the running-board alongside."

Reggie paused, lit a cigarette, and observed with some satisfaction, "Then we had a bit of trouble with John. I *knew* I was right not to engage a Southern boy. I won't say he doesn't look very smart in his white uniform and brass buttons, and there's no denying that the running-board was dirty. However, Roddie soon settled his nonsense, and we started off with a boy on each side and this one flickering lamp in front."

Here Reggie broke off again with telling effect and helped himself to a biscuit.

"What time did you eventually get to Lahadi?" I enquired. I had vivid recollections of the ride myself, and I had had the advantage of travelling in a fast car with all the usual lighting devices.

"Oh, about four o'clock. God, I thought we should never get there, didn't you?" replied Reggie, appealing to Miss Cowley.

Miss Cowley smiled. "I was asleep most of the time," she said.

I looked across at her, cool and *soignée*, sipping tea out of an enamel mug. She must be a good deal tougher than she looks, I thought, and began to discard a few of the doubts which her fragile appearance had raised in me.

"Well, I wasn't—I didn't get the chance," countered

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Reggie, who'd had the responsibility of chaperoning this attractive young woman all the way from Liverpool to Jos and was beginning to feel the strain. "Every five minutes Roddie poked me with his elbow and shouted, 'For God's sake don't let that so-and-so John go to sleep—he'll fall off!' and I had to lean over and bellow at John while Roddie did the same to Kadiri. Then of course the lamp went out about forty times, and I really forget how many times we found ourselves clean off the road and heading for the open bush. And the gears—honestly, you ought to do something about the gears. It's perfectly ridiculous having to take up the floor-boards every time you want to change up or down. Oh, and that reminds me. I want to put in for a new pair of trousers on the firm. Mine are ruined with black oil from the knees downwards."

It was all very good fun, and nobody enjoyed it more than Reggie.

We had quite a banquet that night. Determined to make a good impression, I had ordered a meal which I knew by now to be the most likely to turn out successfully. Tomato soup with little cubes of fried bread, known to Owdu as "spit," was followed by that reliable favourite, salmon s'cakes. Chicken pie with real potatoes from a sack presented by Mr. Clarke, and tinned cabbage, went down very well, and the meal was concluded with tinned peaches, tinned cream, and coffee. Buggerlugs played all his favourite records, the loudest and most martial in character, and there was much satisfactory talk. All the latest trade gossip was prised out of Reggie. Had this or that film

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been trade shown? What sort of notices did it get? What was the photography like? Had old So-and-so's contract been renewed? Later, reminiscences brought forth amusing stories of those haphazard days when films were made more by accident than design—stories which would contrast oddly with the highly organized commercial methods of to-day.

Miss Cowley, elegant and charming in a pink evening gown, did her best to respond to the Major's kind efforts to make her feel at home, but her conversation seemed largely to consist of little "Ohs!" and "Ahs!" and tiny squeals of apprehension as the usual evening invasion from the insect world proceeded.

Whenever I think of Felicity now, I see those dainty shoulders shrinking and dodging, hear those small shrieks of horror. Or else a polite voice enquiring, "Is it out of a tin?" and on receiving the assurance that "it" is, replying still politely, but very firmly, "No, thank you."

Strange, inconsistent, inscrutable little Felicity. If she was alarmed by the natives and our isolation from contact with other white people, she hid her fears admirably. So far as I knew, she passed her nights undisturbed by the rustlings of rats in the thatch and the cries of hyenas and leopards in the bush. At any rate she made no complaint. But she never could get used to the tinned food or the insects, and nothing would induce her to take quinine or wear stout shoes and stockings.

"What do you do, Felicity, when you're at home?" we asked her once.

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"Oh, I get up and fix the flowers, and then I go out—"

"Yes?"

"—and come back again."

"And fix the flowers some more?"

Felicity laughed, and we all laughed, and it is only now that I come to try to write about her that I realize how little I knew of her. We lived in the closest intimacy for four weeks—dressing, undressing, and bathing practically in the same room, but she was as complete a stranger to me when she left to go home as when she arrived.

As soon as our leading lady was available, we had planned to start on the sequence where the district officer and the nurse go riding together and explore a pagan village. Accordingly Felicity, whose middle name had immediately been seized upon and adopted by us all, appeared next morning in immaculate and perfectly cut riding kit, and after breakfast withdrew to a small table on the verandah with a fitted box of make-up which filled me with envy. Not that it was any use for ordinary purposes, but I thought it would have been nice to play with.

When she had covered her small features with a smooth coating of yellow greasepaint and powder, painted her eyelids green, crimsoned her lips and darkened lashes and brows, she hid her rich brown hair beneath a felt hat and stood up for inspection.

"O.K.," pronounced Barkie.

"I don't know about that make-up," doubted Roddie. "I'll have to make a test to-night."

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The six of us then crammed ourselves into the Overland and the camera lorry followed us to a stretch of road where a tall cotton tree and a number of smaller spreading trees and bushes made a pleasing frame for some ride-through shots.

Musa had undertaken to produce a couple of riding horses.

"They must go 'hankali-hankali,'" he was told, because Felicity's riding experience was limited to a hurried course of lessons in the Park just before leaving London.

Waiting at the appointed spot, then, was Musa. From beneath the trees he led forth two docile-looking nags complete with native saddles and bridles.

A whole morning's work, during which every form of persuasion was used, proved that they were indeed docile to the point of complete immobility. Nothing but a very grudging funeral pace could be got out of them.

"Suffering cats!" exclaimed Barkie, his patience exhausted at last. "Is this the best you can do, Musa?"

Musa looked faintly surprised, not to say hurt.

"No, sir," he replied smoothly. "I can get another horse. To-morrow I bring it."

So we took the scene of the D.O. and the nurse about to remount and being interrupted by the native hospital orderly with a message in a cleft stick instructing the girl to go at once to the bungalow of the sick miner Fernandez. The rest of the day was spent in the exceedingly cramped and smelly surroundings of

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a typical pagan village, while Felicity displayed before the camera a passionate interest in aspects of pagan domestic life which probably filled her with the deepest disgust. Breast-feeding, corn-grinding, and grass-mat-making were demonstrated. While photographing some warriors sharpening their weapons we obtained some details of the manner in which these crude instruments are made.

Since their history has always been one of conflict, either with Nature for their food, or with their neighbours for their lives, the making and use of weapons for hunting or war has been one of the main occupations of the pagans.

Luckily for them, Nature has been lavish in placing at their door the materials for the craft. The use to which these raw munitions have been put throws an interesting light on the gaps in the ingenuity of the primitive mind.

Iron ore, in rich surface deposits, abounds everywhere. At some long-distant time, perhaps by accident, they discovered that the red earth could be transformed into useful metal by fire. From time immemorial each tribe has known how to smelt iron and has had its own simple foundry—a pit dug in the ground and lined with fire-resisting clay. The crude, soft metal thus obtained is hammered out into knives, battle-axes, spears, and arrow-heads.

But to this day, in spite of their skill in making the implements, they are condemned to spend far more time sharpening their weapons than in using them. The simple fact that the soft iron may be tempered

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and made to keep a keen edge by heating it red and quenching it in water has eluded them.

The discovery that it is safer to hit your adversary from a distance led, one imagines, to the devising of a skilful way of binding spear-heads on to shafts of bamboo and elephant grass with animal sinews. Thus was the man with the battle-axe outranged. Then came the idea of fitting their weapons with cruel-looking barbs, so that the maximum damage might be inflicted and, later, the inspiration of applying poison juice from the cactus so that an even more hideous death might be ensured for the enemy. Soon they were clever enough to devise or adopt the bow and arrow for long-range work. But again, by some strange gap in their reasoning, they have never found out that by the simple expedient of fixing a feather in the butt of the arrow-shaft they could increase the range and accuracy of the weapon.

To this omission many a D.O. on patrol is indebted for his life, and there is a story told of a young A.D.O. who owes to it his premature retirement from the Nigerian Political Service, for, shocked at such dullness, and filled with zeal for his new vocation, he began to instruct the pagans under his control in the gentle art of feathering.

The following day we set out once more to get the riding scenes. This time Musa arrived leading by a long halter a high-spirited and vicious-looking animal which he assured us would go like the wind. Following him at a discreet distance was a youth leading one of the horses that had been brought on the previous day.

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This creature also seemed to be in a high state of excitement.

"It would be preferable," Musa suggested suavely, "for Mr. Mason to ride the new horse."

The two beasts were led a couple of hundred yards down the road and there, with some difficulty, were mounted by Felicity and Haddon. The idea was that the man and girl should ride together towards the camera, chatting and laughing together.

What actually happened was that Haddon's mount, the instant it was released, bounded forward at a tremendous rate of speed and had passed the camera in a cloud of dust and thudding hooves long before Felicity had covered fifty yards.

Musa permitted himself a philosophic shrug.

"She is a wooman horse," he remarked, and left it at that.

This was all very well for Musa, but the scenes had to be taken. For the best part of the morning Haddon was employed in galloping to Vodni and back in an effort to tire the beast out. Even so, it was only by giving Felicity a hundred yards' start for each shot that we were able to secure sufficient material to put the sequence over.

It may be remembered from the story that in the course of this ride a sentimental interlude took place between the two young people. For this scene Barkie had selected a suitably romantic location high up on the "White Rock" range.

Near the entrance to the valley he led the way along an ascending native path which plunged us suddenly



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from brilliant sunlight into the sinister dappled gloom of a dense avenue of cactus. On either side this prickly barrier rose to a height of eight or ten feet and closed in overhead. The path was narrow and difficult, in addition to being very steep, but we toiled on and eventually emerged on the hill-top, where a group of graceful trees flourished amazingly among the giant boulders.

Here we sank down, wiped our brows, and drank in the view. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon, and below us mile upon mile of rolling country was spread out in a glory of light and shade.

Lovely as it was, however, we had not come merely to admire. Roddie set up the camera, Felicity and Haddon repaired and composed their faces, and a particularly gut-grinding record was selected by Haddon and played on the gramophone. Seated on a rock, with the camera behind them and the open country beyond, the two lovers began to rehearse their tender scene.

This was not one of our best days. Discipline becomes slack at the end of an exhausting period in the sun, and we all developed an unfortunate tendency to giggle when, time after time, Felicity's face was shyly uplifted for Haddon's passionate kisses, only to be wrenched sharply away as a crowd of enterprising flies swooped down to sample the seductive yellow make-up. But at length the flies were banished and Barkie was satisfied that an atmosphere of budding romance had been captured, and we all trooped back down the hill-side.

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When we reached the floor of the valley, Roddie suggested some publicity stills of the outfit coming off location. While these were being taken Dawiya came along with some of his sons. Whether he was wanted or not, scarcely a day passed now without Dawiya putting in an appearance. He was of an inquisitive turn of mind and watched all our movements like a kitten. He now became enormously intrigued by Felicity's three-sided folding mirror.

"Let's have one of Dawiya holding the mirror for Felicity," said Barkie.

So Dawiya sat on a rock with the mirror resting on his knees and grinned delightedly while Felicity sat opposite him in a camp-chair and powdered her face.

Then we reversed the mirror, handed it back to Dawiya, and awaited developments.

At first he sat like a graven image and gazed and gazed at his mirrored face with much the same blank expression as a dog or cat displays if it is held before a mirror. Then he moved his head from side to side, and a comical dismay pervaded his countenance as he saw the movement reflected. He burst out laughing and called to his sons to gather round. They too saw their faces over his shoulders and became convulsed with mirth. We showed him how to adjust the two side wings so that he could see the back of his head. At this he became almost delirious with joy, and twisted and turned in a frenzy of self-admiration. Before he could be persuaded to give up the mirror, a whole tin of tobacco had to be handed over as a counter-attraction.

## *Behind the Camera*

With the advent of Felicity and Reggie and their respective servants, Panyam resthouse fairly hummed with life in the evenings. Felicity's looks and pretty frocks lent us a festive air, and Reggie settled down with a deep and pervading satisfaction to camp life.

Looking back, I think the most glamorous time of the day was that half-hour before dinner when all of us, even Barkie, relaxed and gave ourselves over to the refreshing business of bathing and changing.

As I peeled off my sticky clothes and stepped into my canvas bath in the little inner room where my bed also was now located, snatches of talk and laughter floated over to me, and the sound of water splashing. I caught glimpses of Felicity's white limbs and lacy *lingerie*. Long shadows ran up and down the roof as the boys moved about in the lamplight setting the table. The crickets chirruped with maddening persistency and the gramophone churned out its all-too-familiar repertory. Presently there would be a clink of bottles and glasses and then Haddon's voice calling:

"Cocktail, Natalie?"

"Yes, please—small-small."

"What about you, F'licity?"

"Me, too."

Almost every word that was said could be heard from one end of the resthouse to the other. One evening, as I was drying myself, I overheard the following piece of dialogue.

Barkie, whose insistence on sleeping on the back verandah now proved to have been an exceedingly far-sighted manœuvre, having regard to the present

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overcrowding in the men's quarters, was having his bath, with Owdu in attendance to pour jugs of water over him.

After listening subconsciously to various instructions as to what he would wear, I heard Barkie say, "Are you married, Owdu?"

"No, sir," replied Owdu.

There was a pause, filled by the splashing of water. Then Barkie's voice continued idly, "Why not?"

"Too much humbug, sir," was the rejoinder.

Presumably Barkie was as much taken aback as I was at this novel angle on the state of holy matrimony, for nothing further was said until Owdu added, in a voice charged with meaning, "I be poor man, sir, but when I get plenty money I be going to buy one young gal."

On the principle, we surmised afterwards, of catching 'em early and treating 'em rough.

There seems to be in the Hausa a very strong element of shrewdness, which is evidenced not only in his dealings with his own people (witness Musa's attitude towards his erring wife and Kadiri, and now Owdu's matrimonial principles) but in his attitude towards the white man.

On the Coast it is seldom that the native servants know their master by his own name, which is often to them unpronounceable. Instead, when they have had a chance of sizing up their employer and marking his little mannerisms and characteristics, they give him a Hausa name which is often a source of great embarrassment. What man of meagre stature, for instance,

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could relish the title of "Mai teffi agwagwa"—he who walks like a duck.

Through the Major, who knew everything that went on around the camp and could read the boys like an open book, we learnt the names that had been bestowed upon us.

Roddie, who has developed a permanent stoop due to peering through cameras from a very early age, was immediately christened "Mai-doro"—the owner of the stoop. This name remained with him all the time, though the cognomens of the rest of us underwent several changes.

Barkie received a set of names amounting almost to a condensed life history. In the first blush of energetic enthusiasm he was known as "Mai-yanga," the owner of the swagger—an appellation suffered with rather mixed feelings. When things began to hum and it was discovered that there were very few moments of the day when he was able to take his ease, he became "Sarikin Aiki"—the king of the work. Finally, when the boys saw the multitudinous anxieties of his job and realized that they could not get away with their artful little subterfuges to avoid and postpone the things they had been ordered to do, he received the name of "Sha-wiya"—he who drinks trouble.

Haddon's length of limb at first earned him the name of "Dogo"—the long one. Later on he had a name meaning "the lazy one who sits under the tree," owing to the fact that he sought the shade on every possible occasion in order to preserve his make-up.

Felicity became "Mai-kyau"—the owner of beauty,

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and Reggie received the name of "Dan sofo," meaning, roughly, the old man, owing perhaps to a placid geniality which he is fortunate enough to possess and which in the minds of the Hausawa argued a venerable age.

As for myself, my position as controller of the domestic economy earned me the name of "Uwar gida"—the mistress or mother of the house. As time went on and life became more complicated in the throes of production, I received an alternative title meaning "the frowning one."

## Chapter Fourteen

IT was not until we started on the opening sequences of the film at Vodni resthouse that my duties as script girl came fully into play. Up till then, the scenes taken had been of a purely spectacular nature, involving, in most cases, the use of large crowds when, of course, much of the action was purely fortuitous or, as in the case of the riding scenes and Haddon's patrol scenes, simple sequences which it was possible to complete within a day.

Sequence A at Vodni, however, embraced action taking place in the evening, followed immediately by Sequence B and the events of the following morning, also outside the resthouse. There were a number of entrances and exits and a change of clothing on the part of both the hero and the heroine, and these had to be noted in detail because a replica of the resthouse was to be built in the studio at home in order that scenes taking place in the interior might be shown, and audiences must not be distracted by such incongruities as an artiste passing into the resthouse in trousers, smoking a cigarette, and appearing an instant later in the inner room in shorts, with a pipe in his mouth.

In a very tattered copy of my script of *Palaver*, which I still have, I find the following notes preceding Sequence A.

## *Behind the Camera*

"Hilda Cowley.—Helmet—khaki veil—green-striped silk frock—flesh silk stockings—white kid shoes—brown silk bag.

Haddon Mason.—White shirt (collar up), no pockets—white trousers—belt—keys L. pocket, purse tassels R. pocket—ink spot below R. knee—mosquito boots."

Sequence A, Scene 1, is described in the script as follows:

"Allison is stretched out in his long chair on the verandah. His boy is putting on his mosquito boots. Allison lies back and stretches while the boy pours a drink and puts it in the holder on the arm of the chair. The gramophone is on a small stool beside Allison. He sits up and reaches for the record book and sorts over the contents carefully before selecting 'All Alone,' which is seen in close-up."

When it came to the point of photographing this scene, Roddie decided that the light, brilliant though it seemed, was insufficient for satisfactory results owing to the thatch overhanging the verandah, and so in actual fact the opening shot of the film was taken in the studio at Cricklewood.

The script goes on—and it must be remembered when reading these extracts that those were the days of silent films, when actions spoke louder than words:

*Bush Road—*

A.3—Long Shot.—Car standing idle in road.



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Driver head and shoulders in the bonnet. Jean on a rock by the roadside.

A.4—Close-up.—Jean. She taps the ground impatiently with her foot, sighs, looks at her watch, then up at the sky and finally, with a gesture of irritation, goes over to the car.

A.5—Medium Shot.—Jean comes to driver and calls him sharply. He withdraws his head from the depths and with triumph says:

Title.—“Yes, Ma, I succeed to renovate him proper. My secretary will now make him go.”

Turning, he calls out for his small boy, a diminutive lad who appears and goes wearily to the front of the car and starts to crank and crank, without result.

A.6—Close-up.—Jean. She is thoroughly annoyed and turns away, going to the back of the car.

A.7—Close-up.—Driver and his secretary. Boy turns to driver and speaks:

Title.—“They be all the same. They humbug a person too much.”

Both are truly aggrieved.

And so on. The secretary was Buggerlugs. He was a precocious young gentleman with an impish sense of humour according well with his gnome-like appearance. The Major always spoke to him in Hausa, so he knew very little English, but whenever he found himself in my vicinity he would take a quick look round, dart a mischievous glance at me, and observe in parrot-like tones, “Alfret no good. Eat all soap.”

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Based on my rebuke to Owdu, which he had overheard, this indictment never failed to meet with an uproarious reception from any of the other houseboys who might be around—and I may say that Buggerlugs always made sure of an audience including, if possible, the luckless Alfred—and appeared to have passed into history as a JOKE.

Unfortunately we had made the mistake of laughing at him, so that now, instead of being, as we had hoped, quick and intelligent, Buggerlugs relapsed into coy giggles and had to be spoken to very sharply by his master before any sensible behaviour could be got out of him.

But in spite of the delays and re-takes necessitated by the selfconsciousness of Buggerlugs and the complete vacancy of the small visible portion of the face of Balaclava, who took the part of the driver, at length we covered the scenes to the point where Jean, having discovered that the real cause of the breakdown is absence of petrol, orders the driver to collect some natives to help to push the car to the resthouse.

A large crowd of pagans — men, women, and tumbling babies with grotesque umbilical ruptures— had been absorbed in our activities for the best part of the day. Seated on boulders and hummocks of dried grass, they watched and chattered and joked among themselves, contentedly idle. No work could be done in the fields until the rains came. What could be more agreeable, therefore, than to lounge in the sun watching the strange antics of the white men and women with their three-legged ju-ju. There was nothing to

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fear. Had not their warriors by the hundred played the war game in the valley while the Stooping One turned the handle of the ju-ju at them?

So when the Major called upon them for volunteers to push the car, men and boys came forward willingly and listened attentively while he explained what was required of them. Felicity had no need to simulate an expression of repugnance as the full fragrance of Africa closed in around her and the car began to move slowly out of the picture. Neither was she hard put to it later to register alarm when the pagans closed in on her with outstretched hands and threatening expressions, demanding more money before they would go farther; and it would have been small blame to her if the relief shown on her face when Haddon strode into the picture was more real than assumed, for they were not a pretty sight.

My costume notes for Sequence B read as follows:

“Hilda Cowley.—Striped gent.’s pyjamas (Who was the striped gent, I now wonder?)—white kid shoes.

Haddon Mason.—B.2 as Sequence A, but crumpled and creased. B.5 Bush shirt—shorts—boots and puttees, speckled stockings rolled over with red tabs. Pipe, haversack, and gun. Double terai. B.26 as B.5—Haversack L. shoulder—gun R. hand at trail.

Reginald Fox.—Cawnpore helmet—bush shirt with papers protruding from L. pocket, flap inside. R. pocket O.K. Puttees and boots.”

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At this point in the story, on the following morning, Allison rises from his impromptu couch and goes off to bath and change, what time Fernandez leaves his mine with a load of tin.

We made an early start for these scenes. It was not yet too hot and there were no crowds of pagan spectators to be kept out of range. By half-past eight the camera was set up and Allison, in bush kit, came striding round from behind the resthouse to call Jean before going out shooting. Beckoning a couple of pagan boys, he passed out of the picture.

In just so much time as it takes to shift a camera and focus up again, he re-entered with the boys carrying four plump pigeons which had actually cost him several hours' walking and stalking on the previous evening.

Dismissing the boys with a dash, Allison walked up to the verandah steps, found the can of petrol, registered dismay on learning from Jean the name of the donor, and the scene faded out.

Haddon was then free until the encounter between Jean and Fernandez had been taken.

Although Reggie had been with us for a week or more, this was his first appearance before the camera. As a rule it is not a very good idea to keep an artiste hanging about with nothing to do. He becomes stale and discontented. But Reggie had cheerfully accompanied us so far as an onlooker and now started work with an enthusiasm which put the scenes through in record time. It was a relief, too, for Barkie to be able to handle his artistes direct, without the need for half

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a dozen interpreters, as had often been the case with the native scenes, and for all of us to know that there was a reasonable chance of completing the work scheduled for the day.

Round a bend in the road the camera lorry stood ready loaded with bags of earth to represent tin. The can of petrol was now removed from the verandah (where its exact situation had been marked on the ground), and placed on the lorry also. Reggie was unable to drive, so Balaclava, divested with difficulty of his helmet, without which he appeared curiously naked, and fitted out instead with an old topee, was made to double the parts of chauffeur to Jean and Fernandez. He swung the handle, took his place in the driver's seat, and Reggie climbed up beside him.

The lorry, while by no means new, was more reliable mechanically than the Overland. Balaclava let in the clutch and drove steadily past the camera towards the resthouse.

"He looked at the camera, Barkie!" I called out.

"Did he? Well, back he goes then!"

Relieved at his cheerful tone, I sat down in my collapsible chair while Balaclava backed the lorry round the bend again and the Major harangued him for looking at the camera ju-ju. Watching for and pointing out these lapses on the part of our native artistes was one of my less pleasant tasks. Many a time Barkie spent nearly an hour in organizing and rehearsing a scene, only to hear at the end of it my wretched voice condemning him to start all over again. I felt he must hate me, but it was no use taking any

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chances. We should not see the stuff till we were back in England, and then it would be too late indeed for re-takes.

Whatever it was that the Major said to Balaclava, it proved effective. With eyes averted from the camera he drove past once more, and remained patiently in the lorry until Reggie and Felicity had played their scenes and he received the order to drive on past the resthouse.

This sequence concluded our work at Vodni, and the next item on the schedule was a three days' visit to Pankshin.

Reggie was not required on this location, so he was left behind to keep an eye on the property in the resthouse. Moreover, there was a limit to the accommodation available at Pankshin, and on this score the Major also remained in his round house at Panyam. The scenes to be taken were mainly concerned with Jean and Allison, and we felt that, with Captain Mackenzie to call upon in case of need, we could manage alone the few incidental scenes with natives—and of course there was always Musa, who belonged to Pankshin.

And so, taking with us our own boys to look after us, and a supply of food stores—for in three days five people can make irreplaceable inroads on their host's store-room—we set off for Pankshin.

By this time we were more than half-way through our work on the Plateau and were beginning to think of ways and means of cashing in on our camp equipment and any surplus stores there might be. Above all, we wanted to find a buyer for the Overland, and

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we had received a hint from Captain Mackenzie that he might perhaps consider purchasing her.

Our progress across the plain towards Pankshin, therefore, was accompanied by heartfelt prayers for the good behaviour of our conveyance, and all went well until we were within a mile of our destination. Then the Overland stopped dead. Roddie got out. We all got out. All the floor-boards came out. The lorry drew up behind.

For half an hour Roddie pored over the engine. He and Barkie and Haddon took turns with Balaclava at swinging the handle. It was no use. The floor-boards were replaced, Felicity and I got in, Roddie took the wheel, and the rest of the outfit pushed.

I suppose we had proceeded in this manner for half a mile when suddenly she started again. Barkie and Haddon scrambled in, the boys ran back to the lorry, and we started off once more, feeling very apprehensive indeed of the steep twisting road up to the Residency which lay before us.

And our fears were not unfounded, for half-way up the first gradient she passed out again and began to slide rapidly backwards. On one side of us was a sheer drop down to the plain—on the other the steep wall of the hill-side. Into this Roddie backed her, and there we left her for the boys to push up later. The rest of the way we toiled on foot and straggled ignominiously through the garden to the house, where Captain Mackenzie welcomed us with a sympathy not unminged with relief at his own escape from a bad bargain. For of course he knew all about it!

## *Behind the Camera*

It is very annoying, and I cannot account for it, unless it is because our time at Pankshin was so short, but my memory refuses to yield more than a few brief flashes of our stay. I have asked Barkie, and he cannot remember much either; and Reggie, who came up in the lorry to luncheon on one of the days, seems to have been impressed by the napery and silver, but all else has been blotted from his mind owing to the hair-raising nature of his experiences on the ride back to Panyam after dark.

I remember that Felicity and I slept at the back of the Residency in a round hut with a wire-netting door and no window, and that the three men occupied a tumbledown guest-house on the edge of the hill at the far end of the garden. I remember that the garden itself was considerably less flourishing than when we first visited it. Two months of dry-season weather had left their mark. I remember an arbour smothered in bougainvillæa where Jean pleaded with Allison to be friendly with Fernandez. I remember a wooden bench by a fan-shaped travellers' palm in front of the house, where we shot a little incident of Allison settling a dispute between two native women over the ownership of a baby girl. Girl babies are much prized, for they can be sold in marriage for many thousands of cowries. This was the first time we had called upon any pagan women to take acting parts, and we found them much more difficult to handle than the men.

Then there were some scenes outside the office at the far side of a large quadrangle of mud buildings. I can see Adamu Gatari, the police orderly, standing



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on guard with his rifle outside the low mud doorway, and a dogari in scarlet riding up on a bicycle with some dispatches which were supposed to include Allison's orders to deport Fernandez.

On the last afternoon Captain Mackenzie ordered the performance of a native dance in our honour. All day long the discordant notes of horns and drums echoed and re-echoed as the pagans streamed down from their villages in the hills behind Pankshin and climbed up to the Residency. We could scarcely hear ourselves speak when we took our places in the row of chairs placed ready beneath some trees while the pagans poured on to the open space beyond the tennis court. Some idea of the volume of sound produced may be gathered from the fact that it was heard by Reggie twenty miles away at Panyam.

Both sexes were freshly decorated with red mud for the occasion and the men were fully armed. Afterwards we purchased from them a number of hatchets, knives, and spears which have been a problem to me ever since. The dance itself was curiously disappointing, consisting merely of an endless slow shuffling round in a huge circle, men and women close on each other's heels, while the musicians in the centre carried on their hideous cacophony and the dust rose in suffocating clouds.

## *Chapter Fifteen*

ON our return to Panyam, Reggie's first encounter with Dawiya took place—and I use the word "encounter" because Dawiya took an instant dislike to our charming and agreeable "heavy." Undoubtedly in the stained and disreputable clothing which he wore in the character of Fernandez, he did look pretty villainous, and at first we took Dawiya's antipathy as a tribute to Reggie's powers as an actor. Later we put it down to professional jealousy. Dawiya was like a spoilt child—always wanting to have the first claim on everybody's attention. He had fancied himself as the bad man of the piece, and here was a rival in the shape of a white man. It was an awkward situation, for Dawiya was supposed to be on excellent terms with Fernandez, inasmuch as his friendship meant continued supplies of the fire water.

But spoilt children are usually open to bribery, and Dawiya's passion for English tobacco triumphed over his jealousy. Once his pipe and his capacious goat-skin pouch had been filled with Capstan Medium, he contrived to set aside his personal feelings and carry on. Dawiya, in fact, had all the makings of the worst kind of temperamental film star!

And so Fernandez, followed by a boy carrying bags of money and bottles of alleged gin, made his entry into the village on the hill-side where sat Dawiya and

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Yilkuba the witch doctor with their headmen. After the usual ceremonial greetings, Fernandez put forward his plan. Dawiya, in return for the money and drink, was to ambush Allison on his way through the valley. Dawiya, disregarding the warnings of Yilkuba, agreed. Then the white man, leaving the gin, but reserving the money till the job was done, went away.

Looking back on these and the ensuing scenes when Yilkuba made one more effort to dissuade Dawiya from his defiance of law and order, and when from the White Rock they watched the approach of Allison from the head of the valley, I am amazed at the manner in which these two played together. Although only twenty miles separated Yilkuba from his home town, he was as much a foreigner among the Angas and Sura pagans as if he had come from China. He and Dawiya understood not one word of each other's language. And yet Barkie and the Major got them to appear to be conversing as though they had spent all their lives together and were indeed the very characters in the story.

These scenes concluded the action taking place in the compound and, having gone carefully through the script to make sure that nothing had been missed, we set about the final spectacle of the film—the burning of Dawiya's village by the District Officer in the cause of discipline.

Since we had only one camera, and since the interval of time which might be expected to elapse between the application of the first light and the collapse of the last roof could be a matter of only a few minutes, Barkie

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had ordered two extra sets of grass roofs to be made. In case it should be impossible, even then, to obtain all the long shots, medium shots, and close-ups necessary to build up an exciting sequence, he had approached the chief of a neighbouring village with the proposal that we should set fire to his domain and afterwards provide him with a fresh set of roofs. The chief agreed readily. It was common knowledge that we kept our promises, and who'd be such a fool as to refuse to exchange a collection of old weather-beaten thatches for a brand-new set at no cost whatsoever?

The luck was with us on the day fixed for the burning. While Roddie set up the camera and Barkie and Musa lightly sprinkled the roofs with paraffin, I checked up my notes of Haddon's appearance, daubed his face and his "injured" arm with cocoa, and applied the bandage as nearly as possible as it had been before.

When all was ready, the D.O. entered the village once more with his faithful cook close at his heels. Together they searched for any possible stragglers and then, each lighting a torch, they hurried from hut to hut and in a few moments the whole village was ablaze. There was a tremendous crackling and a frightful smell, but a light breeze blew steadily toward the direction in which the villagers had fled, and Roddie was able to move about and secure plenty of shots without his lens becoming obscured by smoke. The final long shot of Yilkuba, a lonely and dejected figure standing on a boulder looking down on the smouldering ruins, made a most effective fade-out.

Though we used nearly all the spare roofs, we did

## *Behind the Camera*

not find it necessary to take up the option on the neighbouring village. The chief came to the resthouse with tears in his eyes and almost begged us to do so, and was only partly appeased by a dash of the roofs left over.

The surrounding tribes, whether Hausa, pagan, or Fulani, found the firing of the village more puzzling than all our other activities put together. There was a great deal of talk and speculation on the subject, much of it being retailed to us by Musa, but ultimately it came back to the same point. All white men were mad, and this was only a further proof of the fact.

As for Musa, he had his own ideas. It was his considered opinion, delivered with a very knowing air, that the exhibition in England of the "photos" of the pagans, for whose services we had paid so generously in money and bulls, would bring in some hundred times more money than we had spent—a conclusion which we devoutly hoped would come about.

It was just at this time that Haddon was again chosen as an instrument of warning. About nine o'clock one night he suddenly lost consciousness. We thought at first that he had fainted, and applied the usual remedies. When these had no effect we sent for the Major, who looked him over with a practised eye and declared "Och!—he's got a touch o' the sun. Bathe his head and the back of his neck and his wrists with cold water—keep on at him," he advised.

Really cold water was unprocurable, but we called up all the lukewarm reserves and bathed him assiduously, watching his face anxiously all the time for

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some sign of returning life, but the hours flew by and still he remained inert. We were becoming seriously alarmed when at last there was a faint flicker of the eyelids.

"Haddon!" we called. "Haddon—wake up!"

There was another fluttering movement.

"Haddon—come on—you can't die yet—we haven't finished the picture!" urged Barkie, with the flippancy of relief after a period of tension.

Slowly Haddon opened his eyes and the ghost of his crooked smile trembled round his mouth.

"How d'you feel, old boy?" enquired Reggie softly.

"Rotten!" groaned the patient.

And he began to shiver, which was not surprising, since he was pretty well soaked to the skin. So the three men lifted him out of his deck-chair, carried him to his bed, stripped and dried him, and rolled him up in blankets.

The next morning he was perfectly all right, but his collapse had brought it home to us that we were all taking tremendous risks by being out continually from 8 a.m. till 4 p.m. through the hottest part of the day, and from this point of view we were glad that in a week's time we should be back in civilization and within call of medical assistance. Haddon's fairness of skin made him less proof against the dangerous rays of the tropical sun than any of the others, except perhaps myself. But although I wore no scarlet-lined spine pad, as the men did, my topee had a wide brim and a veil depending from it over my shoulders, and I suffered no ill effects; indeed, I am convinced that

## *Behind the Camera*

the energetic open-air life among young people who regarded me as a normal person did more for me than all the treatments and medicines in the world could have done. There was always a hand ready to help me over the rough places. With Barkie pulling in front and Roddie pushing from behind, my progress up the hill-sides was slow and undignified to a degree, but I got there, and I was grateful beyond words for their patience and the fact that nobody found it necessary to worry about me. One of the worst disadvantages of a physical disability is having people worry about you.

In every other respect we had all been extremely well, in spite of the disturbing discovery that at one time the water used for the sparkleg had been neither boiled nor filtered over a period of several days. There had been no fever and very little evidence of the hob-nailed livers predicted by Barkie. We had no time to indulge in such luxuries. Even Felicity, who steadily refused to take quinine and ate practically nothing, seemed well enough at the time, though she was very ill on the boat going home and suffered for some months afterwards.

Yet another indication that it was time to "up stakes" and move in from the bush came in the form of a tornado. The forerunning banks of dark clouds and distant rumblings should have prepared us for some sort of atmospheric disturbance, but we were so taken up with the enjoyment of the cool, delicious wind that sprang up that we failed to observe these portents. At the bottom of the compound was a large mound of

## *Behind the Camera*

age-hardened wanga-wangas, a vegetable root growth something like an artichoke. These were seized upon by the men and, under pressure of the increased energy inspired by the change of temperature, a primitive game of football was embarked upon. Felicity and I stood by and absorbed in great gulps the refreshing rain-laden air. Presently large drops of rain began to fall. These were greeted with whoops of joy, while the wind rose steadily. Suddenly the Thing was upon us—blinding sheets of rain and a terrific wind. Drenched instantly, we put down our heads and made a bee-line for the verandah, but it was too late to do anything. Chairs, tables, cushions, lamps—every movable object was already overturned by the mighty wind that swept through the resthouse from back to front, laying waste everything in its path. It was almost impossible to stand up. All we could do was to cling to the walls and each other, while in an incredibly short space of time the verandah was transformed into one vast lake.

The storm lasted about an hour, and then the sun broke through again. Feeling extremely foolish, we called the boys to restore order while we removed our sodden garments and hung them out to dry.

“Well, thank Heaven we burnt the compound in time,” commented Barkie. And this comforting reflection, following on the sight of Haddon capering up and down the shores of the verandah lake in a simulated transport of childlike glee over the fleet of paper boats he had launched, did much towards our recovery.



## *Behind the Camera*

From now onwards our hopes were concentrated on the completion of our work on the Plateau without any further disaster. Felicity's scenes were finished. Haddon was required only for one brief scene at Barracki-n-Lahadi. Their return passages were booked and the sailing date drawing near. Before we could leave Panyam, however, there remained to be taken the scenes of Dawiya and his headmen "making whoopee" round their camp fire on the night before the attack on Allison.

In order that Roddie might make a photographic test and that Dawiya might see that there was nothing to fear, we had already lit a bonfire and burned some magnesium flares one night not far from the resthouse, but the actual scenes were to be taken in a pagan village near at hand, for even if we had got there in daylight, it would have been a difficult and dangerous undertaking to climb down in the darkness from Dawiya's compound in the Valley of the White Rock with all the camera gear, and in any case one pagan village is very much like another. We had considered all this, of course, before the burning of the compound.

While it was still daylight, then, on the day after the tornado, we turned in single file along a narrow path leading off into the bush just beyond the Major's round house. Behind us came the Georges with all the usual impedimenta, supplemented by a large box of flares. Adamu Gatari brought up the rear.

At first the way led between plots of ground which would be sown with crops as soon as the wet season set in, but presently we passed over a flat area of rock

## *Behind the Camera*

full of shallow depressions where the pagan farmers spread out their grain to dry. Beyond this rose the tall barrier of cactus surrounding the village.

We filed through the narrow opening. Dawiya and his headmen awaited us. The galadima of the village was also there with some of his followers. The rest of the population appeared to have been banished, though a number of dark faces were to be seen peering out of odd corners.

In an open space among the huts a bonfire had been built. Round this Dawiya and his henchmen were to drink and dance. Barkie and Roddie at once set to work tamping down flares in a row of kerosene cans which had been filled with earth. These they placed where their light would show up to the best advantage the gleaming, oiled bodies of the native artistes. When the scene had been rehearsed we sat down to wait for darkness to fall.

This was the last day of the Fast of Ramadan. It was a beautiful evening, calm and clear. The sky was a pale primrose colour tinged with green. Far away, beyond the huddled pointed roofs of Panyam, beyond the darkening hills, gleamed the slender sickle of the new moon. I have in my mind a vivid picture of Adamu Gatari standing on the rocky plateau outside the village, his neat blue serge uniform and pill-box hat silhouetted sharply against the lovely sky, his sturdy putteed legs and bare feet planted "at ease," his hands clasped on the barrel of the rifle before him, and his face raised in rapt contemplation of the silver symbol which meant so much to all Mohammedans

## *Behind the Camera*

that night. Round about him the Georges, in their rags and tatters, stood or sprawled, their faces also turned towards the moon, their thoughts no doubt centred on the moment of their release when they would join the festivities in the village of Panyam, sounds of which were already floating to us on the still air. Throughout this month of fasting they had carried out their duties with a most admirable stoicism. Day after day, while the fierce sun beat down upon them, they had borne their heavy loads up hill and down dale without so much as a drop of water to moisten their lips, and without complaint. But in a little while now they would reap their reward. They had plenty of money to spend, for their wages of a shilling a day had raised them to a position of considerable affluence. There would be high doings in the village to-night.

Swiftly the dusk gave way to darkness. A drift of smoke from the fire and the sound of Barkie's voice giving instructions drew me to my post behind the camera. Reggie, Haddon and the Major, matches in hand, stood by the flares which they were to light. Of these, four were placed in a semicircle before the fire, opposite to Dawiya and his men; two were placed on boulders at either side, out of range of the camera, but in such a position that they would throw up a suggestion of the background of huts; and a couple more had been secured to the branch of a tree just behind the camera. All had to be lit as nearly as possible at one time so that their two minutes' duration should coincide and give a steady flow of light.

## *Behind the Camera*

Dawiya and his men sat cross-legged on the ground, some holding spears, others knives. Dawiya himself clasped a knife in one hand and a calabash in the other. The fire began to crackle and blaze. Barkie sprang up on a boulder alongside the camera and crouched down to the level of the lens.

"Now then, folks," he called, "are you all ready? . . . Are you ready, Roddie? . . . Right! Light the flares!"

The three men hurried from flare to flare. There was a hiss and a splutter and a blinding glare of light.

"Right, Musa! Start the action!"

Musa shouted some unintelligible instructions to Dawiya.

"Fade in, Roddie," said Barkie, in an urgent undertone.

Roddie commenced to turn as Dawiya raised his calabash to his lips, drank deeply, passed it on. While the calabash travelled from mouth to mouth, Dawiya rose to his feet, brandished his knife above his head, and shouted defiance of the white man and all his works. In twos and threes the headmen rose and gathered round, stamping their feet, lifting their spears and shouting their war-cry. The dark, oiled bodies and flashing white teeth gleamed amid a forest of strong arms and spear shafts, the drifting smoke from the fire and the flares lending the scene a weird and ominous quality.

"Fade, Roddie—fade!" shouted Barkie, as the first of the flares began to gutter out.

Still turning steadily, Roddie raised his free left

## *Behind the Camera*

hand and slowly drew down the little rod which closed the shutter and brought about the gradual fading out of the picture. This done, he dropped his hands and stood back.

"How's that, bo?" he enquired.

"Fine and dandy," said Barkie, jumping down from his perch and signalling to Musa to stop the action.

"Now, Roddie, we'll move the camera up and take some close-ups of old Dawiya doing his stuff," he continued.

"More flares!" he called to Waistcoat and Pathetic, who were standing by the box bewildered and not quite sure whether they ought to be frightened or not.

By the light of hurricane lamps, which seemed terribly inadequate after the previous brilliant glare, the camera was moved and the burnt-out flares replaced. Coughing and sneezing, and with watering eyes, we groped about in the semi-darkness, for the fumes from the flares, the smell of the refuse of which the fire was largely composed, and the vapours drawn by the heat from the rain-sodden earth and the walls of the surrounding huts made the atmosphere pretty overpowering.

When all was ready Dawiya, delighted at this further opportunity of showing off his powers as an actor under such thrilling conditions, blithely repeated the action. A third and fourth time the flares were renewed and Roddie "panned" round and got quick flashes of the more picturesque of the warriors.

"Well, I think we'll call it a day now," said Barkie

## *Behind the Camera*

at last. "I'm fairly satisfied that I can get what I want out of that lot."

Nobody actually said "Thank God!" but we all set about our various jobs with more than our usual alacrity, impeded though we were by the smoke and the darkness, for it really had been a very uncomfortable evening. In his own inimitable way, part gesture, part Hausa and part English, Roddie conveyed to the Georges that we were finished. Soon we were picking our way back along the path to the resthouse, the hurricane lamps illuminating white legs in khaki puttees, white legs in thick stockings, white legs in canvas leggings, black legs in white knickers ending at the calf, black legs twinkling in and out of dirty flapping draperies, black legs encased in shining steel with grass protruding top and bottom, black legs in dark blue puttees, and black legs innocent of all trappings and adornments, thin straight legs, strong and sinewy, the feet regardless of the stony path, padding silently along.

Arrived at the resthouse, the Georges stood with their loads by the end of the verandah, waiting to hand them up to Roddie. The camera gear was never long out of his sight. First the tripod, and then case after case passed through the narrow space between wall and thatch and was placed by his bed, ready to be cleaned and overhauled. When it was all in and counted, "Shikenna!" said Roddie ("All right—that's enough—off you go"), and off went the Georges without further ado, chattering and laughing as they hurried down the road to the village.

## *Chapter Sixteen*

WHEN we began to make plans for our return to Barracki-n-Lahadi it very soon became evident that the move could only be accomplished in relays, starting with Felicity and Haddon, continuing with Barkie, Roddie, and me, and leaving Reggie, who would not be wanted for a day or so, and who had become so attached to Panyam that he hated the thought of leaving, to stay behind and superintend the loading and dispatching of food stores, furniture, hardware, and crockery, etc., which could be left to the last. Previous experience with Balaclava and the lorry had also convinced us that it would be quicker, safer, and far less expensive to employ a succession of carriers to convey all but the heaviest boxes over the thirty miles of bush to Mr. Clarke's camp.

This line of action having been decided upon, Dawiya and Yilkuba were sent for and informed that in a few days they would be required to make a journey to Durowa, a small mining camp not far from Barracki-n-Lahadi, where they were wanted for scenes with Fernandez outside his bungalow.

Yilkuba accepted the project with his usual aristocratic calm, but from Dawiya we received an unexpected setback. He blankly refused to go. He had never left his own country before, and the prospect terrified him. Every conceivable inducement was held

## *Behind the Camera*

Advancing towards me was a small procession of pagan youths armed with spears, knives, and bows and arrows, and waving small branches of trees. The leader, who walked a little in front of the others, held before him a stick with something fastened on the end of it. Plainly they were all highly delighted with this object, but they were in no hurry, and it was some minutes before they were near enough for me to discover what it was.

It turned out to be the head of a baby leopard, tastefully surrounded with a fringe of green leaves, after the manner of a Victorian posy. The rest of the animal had no doubt been eaten, for there was no sign of it. The little hunting party passed on rejoicing, leaving me at the cross-roads feeling vaguely sick, and glad of the distraction provided by the sight of Roddie approaching from the opposite direction in the Overland.

The next morning, when we were all in the throes of last-minute packing, Musa appeared at the foot of the resthouse steps with a very sheepish-looking Dawiya.

"Dawiya say he come now," announced Musa, as though he himself had brought about this change of heart.

"Very well, Musa," said Barkie, who was busy stowing into a chop box an awkward selection of knives and hatchets. "Tell him he must be ready to leave when I send for him in a few days' time."

"Yes, sir," replied Musa respectfully, turning



## *Behind the Camera*

with a startling change of manner to pass on this information.

Dawiya nodded his head several times, stooped in obeisance to Barkie, and then walked away with a noticeable modification of his usual blustering gait.

"Now, Musa," continued Barkie, "when I am ready I shall send the lorry back here and you will bring Yilkuba and Dawiya to me at Durowa. D'you understand?"

"Yes, sir," said Musa, his narrowed black eyes fixed on Barkie in a shrewd, unwinking regard.

"And while they are at Durowa you will see that they are comfortably housed and fed."

"Yes, sir," repeated Musa. "Ooh, I *must*!" he added, from which familiar turn of phrase we understood that the instructions given would receive his most particular attention.

And now the last moments at Panyam had really come. The Overland and the lorry stood laden in the compound.

A final glance round the bedroom. One more memory, perhaps more strange and enduring than many, had been added to its store of passing travellers. Empty, secret and brooding, it awaited the next arrival.

A second's farewell to the little inner room where Barkie and I had called "Good night!" to each other across the wall. . . .

"Come on, S'Webb, we're waiting!"

Back through the double doors . . . a long look up

## *Behind the Camera*

and down the shady verandah where only Reggie's chair remained . . . and then down the uneven steps, with a last ducking of the head to dodge the bougain-villæa hanging from the thatch.

"Good-bye, Reggie—see you again soon."

"Good-bye, Major—a thousand thanks for all you've done for us——"

"Push 'em, George—push 'em!"

A last look back at the little camp and the peaked roofs of Panyam squatting in the sun—a last look forward at the sentinel cotton tree at the turn of the Vodni road, and the well-known outline of hills that hid our valley—and then round to the right, across the little bridge, past the mission house, shrouded in mystery to the end—and once more out on to the bush road.

We were a silent little party. Beside Roddie in the front of the Overland sat Tom. Barkie and I and an uncomfortable assortment of golf sticks and pagan implements of war occupied the back. Behind us, perched on the loaded lorry, were three of the Georges, and beside Balaclava at the wheel sat Owdu, his dignity somewhat impaired by the fact that he had not been invited to ride with us.

Down into the deep culvert, which now held no terrors for Roddie—over the plank bridge and up the other side—on through Mongu—past the place where Roddie and I had slid backwards on the outward journey—and so towards the long gradual incline on the other side of which lay Durowa—and beyond that Barracki-n-Lahadi.

## *Behind the Camera*

Though I had entertained sentimental regrets at leaving Panyam, it was with a feeling of homecoming that I entered the cool, lofty bedroom at Barracki-n-Lahadi. While Tom prepared my bath in the out-house, I removed my muddy boots, puttees, and breeches, and unlocked the wardrobe trunk, which was just where I had left it, behind the door.

Later, much refreshed and wearing a black dinner gown for the first time in months, I surveyed myself critically in the half-length mirror. I had lost a satisfactory amount of weight, my reflection informed me, but my complexion bore witness to a long period of enforced abstinence from fresh vegetables, and my hair must be washed without delay.

On the morning following our return to the camp, Haddon's last scene was taken. In one of the two small verandahs on the front of the house, which was supposed to represent a bush hospital, an iron bedstead was erected. As there was nobody else available, Mr. Clarke being far too shy, Barkie put on a pyjama jacket and a mournful expression and allowed himself to be visited by Haddon. According to the script Felicity should have appeared in this scene, but as for some unexplained reason she had been sent out without any uniform, we had to content ourselves with a long shot of Haddon walking up to the verandah and greeting his friend, reserving the closer shots for the studio.

The shot only took a few minutes, and as soon as it was over Haddon and Felicity said good-bye to everybody and drove away with Roddie on the first stage of

## *Behind the Camera*

their long journey home. I heaved a sigh as I saw them go, for all too soon the rest of us would be following.

With Reggie, a few days later, came a final echo from Panyam.

"What sort of a time have you had?" we asked him, as we all sat round in deck-chairs in front of the house, partaking of drinks and small chop just beyond the circle of lamplight from the house.

"Oh, not so bad," replied Reggie. "But it was rather lonely without you all—and one night I had a bit of a fright——"

"What happened?" somebody asked, for if the imperturbable Reggie could go so far as to admit that he'd had a "bit of a fright," we knew there must be some sort of story attached.

"It was nothing much," said Reggie, taking a cigarette from the round tin at his elbow. "In fact, it was rather funny, now that I come to think of it." He paused, and his handsome features were suddenly and grotesquely illuminated as he bent forward to light his cigarette. "After you'd gone, I continued to sleep in the open room, practically on the verandah. One night I woke suddenly and became aware of cautious movements around me, and the murmur of native voices. It was pitch dark, of course," said Reggie, to whom, apparently, adventure always came cloaked in impenetrable gloom. "I couldn't find my torch, and for a few minutes I lay there stiff with horror, thinking of all the tales I'd heard of white men being murdered in their beds. It was a very nasty feeling, I don't mind telling you."

## *Behind the Camera*

Reggie paused again, while three pairs of eyes followed the glowing end of his cigarette up to his mouth and away again.

"However," he went on, "I pulled myself together, don't y'know, and called out, 'Who's there? What d'you want?' Nobody answered. There wasn't a sound. I called again. Presently a voice came out of the darkness of the compound. 'It's me, sir,' it said. 'Musa Katagum. The carriers be here ready to go for Barracki-n-Lahadi.'

"Well, at that I really was wild," admitted Reggie. "I yelled to Wiya to light the lamp and I got up, cursing and feeling no end of a damn fool. When the lamp came I looked at the time. It was 1 a.m.—and those carriers were supposed to have reported at noon on the previous day."

"So what did you do, Reggie?"

"Cursed them and saw them off with the loads and went back to bed," was the laconic reply.

"But, Reggie," I put in, "why didn't you move into the room with the door after we'd gone?"

"Oh—I don't know——" said Reggie vaguely. "The Major told me I ought to, but," with sudden vigour, "I was damned if I could see why I should let the boys think I was afraid, so I stayed where I was."

There was silence for a moment or two. Then Barkie said :

"How is the Major?"

"Oh, he was all right when I left. Busy packing up to go back to his beloved Bornu."

## *Behind the Camera*

Whether the Major went back to Bornu, whence he had come, or not, we never knew, for these few words of Reggie's proved to be the last we ever heard of one who had been a good friend and an invaluable ally for two strenuous months.

But that is the picture business all over.

Again and again, in the course of work, one is thrown for a brief period into intensely intimate relationships with people both outside and inside the business in circumstances which, by their very trying nature, call forth either the best or the worst in the people concerned, and one feels, "I mustn't lose sight of this or that person," or, regrettably and more frequently, "Thank God, I need never set eyes on them again when this picture's finished!"

In any event, there is little or no choice, for one is either immediately pitchforked into another set of circumstances involving a fresh set of people in a different part of the world, or a different studio, which amounts to the same thing, or else one is "out"—in which case one is, to all intents and purposes, dead.

But to return to a more cheerful theme. In due course Musa arrived with Dawiya and Yilkuba in the lorry, and for several days the centre of activity was an attractive three-roomed thatched bungalow at Durowa, round which the hills rose steeply on all sides. The occupant of the bungalow and manager of the small tin mine adjacent was one Oakley, a lanky, easy-going soul who fortunately viewed with tolerant amusement our efforts to create an atmosphere of moral degeneracy suitable to the villainous Fernandez, whose abode it

## *Behind the Camera*

was supposed to be, by strewing the compound with an impressive selection of empty bottles, old tin cans, newspapers, straw and packing-cases, and hurling at his whitewashed walls pails of muddy water.

Here Dawiya and Yilkuba did their stuff with Reggie with all their accustomed verve, but although in his off-duty time Yilkuba smoked his pipe and drank his beer with that unruffled serenity which had been the keynote of his behaviour from the beginning, I fancy he was not sorry when the time came for him to return to his own part of the world. As for Dawiya, he cried himself to sleep each night that he was away from home, and it was only with difficulty that Musa persuaded him to remain until we had finished with him.

Early on our last day with them Barkie dashed Musa a bag containing five pounds in silver. Musa beamed, called down all the blessings of Allah, and thereupon absented himself for a period of several hours.

When next seen, he was wearing a brand-new riga and turban of dazzling whiteness, while behind him sidled a coy, mahogany-coloured girl whom he introduced proudly as a new Mrs. Musa Katagum, whom he had seen, courted, and wed in the short meanwhile.

With many promises on our part to return, and a naïve reminder from Musa regarding a wrist-watch to be sent to him from England, we watched our two artistes and Musa and his girl climb into the lorry for their homeward journey. Soon they were out of sight.

It appears unlikely that we shall ever redeem our

## *Behind the Camera*

promise to revisit the Plateau, but such personalities are not easily forgotten. I have heard, too, that the visit of the white men with their camera ju-ju is still spoken of in Panyam and has no doubt taken its place as a legend among the Hausa story-tellers beneath the trees of the market-place.

A further week with Reggie in the mines at Durowa and Keffi completed our work, and it seemed no time at all before we were leaning out of the Overland waving good-bye to Bill Clarke. So another link was severed. For although we corresponded for a while and arranged a meeting in town some months later, we have never seen Bill Clarke from that day to this. And, in a way, I am not sorry. I like to remember him, tall and purposeful, striding about the camp in his khaki shorts and open-necked shirt, his wide-brimmed Aussie hat shading his lean, strong face, his dogs bounding around him with that lovable Airedale "rocking-horse" motion.

As for the old Overland—in exchange for the astounding sum of £40 she was handed over to a couple of optimistic young engineers whose ingenuity she must have taxed to the not-far-distant end of her days.

There remained but the Georges, and they, true to type, were left slumbering peacefully on the platform at Bukuru as we drew out of the station in the early dawn. Owdu and Tom alone returned with us to Lagos, Tom to re-enter thankfully the service of a mistress more comfortably domiciled than I had ever been, and Owdu to mingle once more with the crowds



## *Behind the Camera*

on the Marina equipped, for once in his rascally life, with a bona fide chit of sincere recommendation.

Some months later, when *Palaver* had been launched on a successful run at the Marble Arch Pavilion, and we were already at work on another film, there came a faint echo from Panyam :

“Pankshin,  
C/o Post Office,  
Jos, Northern Nigeria,  
26.11.1926

Captain G. Barkas,  
British Instructional Films Ltd.  
England.

SIR,

“I have the honour most respectfully to acknowledge the receipt of the kind present of a most beautiful silver watch (with my name engraved thereon, also your name Mai-Yanga). I thank you and your Company very much for this kind present to me. The kindness is much admired by all who I have shown. I look forward to the day in which your firm will consider sending you out again especially to this our Division to take some more Pictures—for this I am daily praying.

Again, I am thanking you for the kind recommendation that you have made for me which is undoubtedly the offspring of this most valuable present.

Wishing you and your Company the Compliments of the forthcoming season. I am very, very much glading of hearing that from you, all the

## *Behind the Camera*

Pictures you have take here in Nigeria are quite good. Please, give my best compliments for Miss Web, Miss Cley, Mr. S. Rodwell, Captain Pitter Allison and Mr. Fox. Trusting you are keeping fit, please.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your most obedient Servant,

MUSA KATAGUM.

Government Messenger,  
Pankshin Division."

















